DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

IN

NORTHERN ALBERTA

A Report Prepared by
the Northern Development Branch
in Consultation with the Steering Committee
on Downtown Revitalization in Northern Alberta

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION.	1
WHY DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
PROCESS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION.	20
ECONOMICS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION.	25
DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATON PROGRAMS	34
British Columbia	35
Nova Scotia.	38
Heritage Canada.	40
Other Provincial Programs.	42
NORTHERN ALBERTA REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES	48
DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION IN ALBERTA.	59
FURTHER RESOURCES REQUIRED.	74
SUMMARY	79
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
APPENDIX A - SURVEY CONTACT LIST	
APPENDIX B - COMMUNITY INDICATOR SURVEY	
APPENDIX C - SURVEY RESULTS	
APPENDIX D - PROVINCIAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES	
APPENDIX E - SUMMARY OF PROGRAM FUNDING COMPONENTS	

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION
INTRODUCTION

Background

During the past years, various communities and organizations in northern Alberta have become increasingly interested in improving and redeveloping their downtown core areas. Higher retail leakage, a difficulty attracting new businesses, and fluctuating economic conditions are some of the challenges currently facing northern communities. In their attempts to overcome these challenges, communities are asking what is available in terms of support, financial or otherwise, for implementing revitalization projects and plans. In an effort to obtain a thorough review of their ideas and concerns, several communities have approached the Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) requesting assistance and support.

To become more familiar with the issues, the NADC requested that a detailed review of downtown revitalization be undertaken. This report is an attempt to broadly examine the issues and concerns encountered by northern communities and the assistance presently available to communities wanting to revitalize their downtowns.

The purpose of this report is consistent with the function of the NADC which is:

"to investigate, monitor, evaluate, plan and promote practical measures to foster and advance general development in northern Alberta, and to advise the government... and make recommendations thereon in respect of:

a) social and economical development;

b) development of communities and service delivery; and

c) development of government services and programs."[1]

Objectives and Methodology

In August 1986, a steering committee was organized. This committee consisted of interested and involved representatives, both from private industry and related government agencies. The steering committee members are listed on the following page.

Steering Committee Members

Tren Cole
Alberta Economic Development and Trade
Edmonton, Alberta

George Ilagan
Inter-Agency Planning Branch, Alberta Municipal Affairs
Edmonton, Alberta

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Peace River Board of Trade
Peace River, Alberta

Rob Roycroft
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Peace River, Alberta

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Berwyn, Alberta

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Alberta Lands Ltd.
Grande Prairie, Alberta

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Pal Travel
St. Paul, Alberta

Ken Drake
K.C. Consulting
Grand Centre, Alberta

Bernie Hornby
NADC Member, Mayor of Fox Creek
Fox Creek, Alberta

Jerry Archibald
Northern Development Branch
Peace River, Alberta

Arlene Reid
Northern Development Branch
Peace River, Alberta

The steering committee established the following objectives:

- To determine and describe what programs presently exist in Alberta for downtown revitalization and to identify any gaps which may surface

- To analyze and evaluate existing downtown revitalization programs in other provinces

- To determine community concerns and interests regarding downtown revitalization in northern communities

- To explore the economic results of revitalization in the community

- To make conclusions based on these findings

The study approach utilized several sources of data:

- A literature review of publications and reports on downtown revitalization, including program administration guidelines and case studies

- Interviews with individuals, both government and non-government, who could provide background and insight into the topic area

- A survey involving 26 towns in northern Alberta with populations of 1,000 and over, in an effort to get input on issues and concerns surrounding downtown revitalization in their communities

- A field trip to four communities in British Columbia by the research team, as well as an in-depth interview with the program administrator of that province's Downtown Revitalization Program

Definition

One of the first tasks of the steering committee was to define the term "downtown revitalization". An Alberta Municipal Affairs' report was the basis for the definition adopted by the steering committee.[2]

> **Downtown revitalization is the improvement in the business vitality of an area through more aggressive and cooperative marketing and promotional programs, and improvements in sales and service. Physical improvements to meet the main objective of revitalizing the area are necessary.**

The key ideas in this definition include economic improvements to enhance the business vitality of an area, along with physical improvements as required.

The "downtown" of downtown revitalization refers to that area which is the commercial centre of a community and includes much of the retail and service sectors as well as government and professional services, agencies and possibly recreational centres. Defining the boundaries of the downtown can be done by assessing main transportation routes, natural physical boundaries and land use plans. In some communities, the downtown area is very easily defined; others however may require more analysis and discussion. Whatever the businesses located in the "downtown", it is important that the area chosen reflect the values and views of local businesses. The composition of downtown must be a local decision and coming to an agreement is one of the first steps in the revitalization process.

Report Layout

In order to provide an overview of downtown revitalization a number of aspects are discussed in the report. The reasons for, the process in, and the economics of revitalization are provided, as well as a review of available literature. Downtown revitalization initiatives in Alberta and other provinces follow, with one chapter devoted to recent revitalization activities in northern Alberta. An analysis of what further resources may be required in Alberta precedes the summary and conclusions.

1 The Northern Alberta Development Council Act, 1975.

2 Keith Driver and Associates Ltd., "A Guide to Downtown Revitalization", Alberta Municipal Affairs, June, 1981, p.3.

WHY DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Introduction

Downtown has been the traditional heart of the Canadian community. It is the focus of energy and activity, the centre of market, business, cultural, social, recreational and administrative activities. It is the place where people go to buy the things they need, renew acquaintances, conduct important transactions and come together as a community. Downtown is often the oldest part of town, the intersection of main streets and the site of important events.

Functions of Downtown

A healthy vital downtown serves several key functions in a community:[4]

1. There is a stronger tax base since long-term revitalization involves the establishment of more and viable businesses.

2. Jobs are retained and created through the stabilization, expansion, and addition of local businesses.

3. A revitalized business district increases public options for goods and services.

4. Commercial districts serve as symbols of community pride and quality-of-life, factors which strongly influence corporate decisions to locate in a community. If towns hope to attract new industry, tourism and investment, they must present themselves as progressive, vital communities.

A number of factors can be identified that can influence or reduce the effective functioning of downtown. Some of these factors follow:

- External competition, such as shopping centre development outside of the downtown area, can attract both retail businesses and shoppers away from the downtown. In some communities, shopping centres have drawn as much as 60% of the retail trade from downtown.

- Passive management techniques by some merchants have resulted in less stock selection, fewer imaginative window displays and poorly maintained shops. It has also made the merchants slower to react to competitive challenges such as shopping centre development.

- The economy has an effect on the spending power in a community with a poorer economy and increased unemployment reducing the spending power and ultimately decreasing sales figures. Business closures and layoffs can result.

Some northern communities have additional influences affecting the functioning of their downtowns.

- Retail sales leakage from the north has been documented in many northern communities and is a major competitive challenge to overcome.

- Attracting new businesses to northern Alberta can be a problem for some communities. This can affect the local shopping mix and in some cases the selection of goods and competitiveness of prices.

A number of indicators, as listed in Revitalizing Downtown Alberta: A Self Help Kit, can be used to identify possible problem areas in a community. In discussing and analyzing these indicators, a community can determine if their downtown is functioning effectively or if there may be a need for revitalization efforts. The following relate to economic and physical indicators.

- Failure to tap the potential market
- Failure to effectively compete with other centres in selection and price
- Increasing storefront vacancy rate
- Decreasing number of people downtown
- Vacant land downtown
- Unstable employment base
- Local retail dollars going elsewhere (business leakage)
- Poorly maintained public space
- Poorly maintained building facades

Downtown can be restored to its healthy state and to its ability to perform a vital function in the community. Major investments of time, energy, and money can improve the economic well-being and physical attractiveness of downtown.

History of Downtown Revitalization

In 1955, one of the first revitalization projects took place on Magdalen Street in Norwich, England. Its dilapidated downtown, which began to deteriorate in the 1930s depression and continued to do so in World War II, was in dire need of a make-over.

Eighty-two of 84 merchants voluntarily participated; 66 buildings were repainted in coordinated colors. This pilot project, deemed highly successful, encouraged Britain to complete over 400 similar projects.[5]

During the mid-60s, the U.S.A. and Canada began similar undertakings with programs called "Beautification" and the "Norwich Plan" respectively. The first projects in Canada took place in Ontario - in Oakville and Niagara Falls. The merchants contributed to a fund for trees, flags and flowers, although participation was voluntary. More than 200 towns in Ontario, Nova Scotia and British Columbia were involved.

In 1973, the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations initiated a revitalization program entitled Main Street Alberta. Main Street Alberta was in operation for five years and, during those years, 161 communities in Alberta and 12 in B.C. spent over $10 million carrying out facelifts in their downtowns. The program funding provided two-thirds of the eligible costs; the community contributed one-third. Projects completed included street furniture, flower boxes, kiosks, pocket parks and pedestrian malls.

The results of all this beautification, however, were disappointing. By the 1970s, there was an awareness of failure in the U.S.A. It was discovered that beautification alone doesn't work; the complexity of the community had been underestimated. More than beautification is needed if downtown is to be resuscitated.

So, revitalization efforts took a new approach. In England, steps were taken to downplay the new paint and instead to develop schemes to bring life back to downtown. In the U.S.A., the American Main Street Program initiated three pilot projects to get at the root of the decline problem. Their approach was two-fold:

1. Adopt highly effective management techniques similar to those used by the shopping centres.
2. Promote the assets of the downtown, specifically those unavailable in the shopping centres.

The preliminary findings were so encouraging that the National Main Street Centre was created and projects took place all over America. Most of the communities experienced vacancy reduction, increased tourism, restored buildings and heritage awareness - general downtown economic revitalization.

Revitalization Today

The present view of downtown revitalization is reflected in the definition at the start of this report. Based on that definition, revitalization includes a variety of components, including cooperation, marketing and physical improvements. A national non-profit organization, Heritage Canada, has had a Main Street Program since 1980. Although it will be dealt with in more detail later in this report, this program's objective is to help communities revitalize their main streets. The program is structured around four components:

1. Organization and Management - To coordinate and bring together business, government, owners and associations to form a plan of action

2. Promotion - Strategies to market and "sell" downtown and its individual businesses such as special events, attractions, activities

3. Design - Physical improvement of downtown including building and facade renovations, street beautification and signage

4. Commercial and Economic Development - Exposure to the techniques of competitive management, and business recruitment and encouragement of new businesses

It is clear that the process of revitalization involves much more than a mere facelift of downtown. Although interest in the downtown may be briefly stirred with physical improvements, there is usually little in terms of lasting economic effect.

A comprehensive mixture of cooperation, coordination and promotion is required if downtown is to return to play the vital community role it once did.

3 Jacques Dalibard, "Bringing Them Back to Life," Canadian Heritage, May-June 1983, p. 32.

4 National Main Street Centre, Urban Planning Program.

5 Jacques Dalibard, "The Historical Context, " Reviving Main Street. Deryck Holdsworth ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), p.57.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature available on downtown revitalization is expansive, although all is not particularly relevant to the northern Alberta situation. Much written material pertains to very large urban centres, and most comes out of the U.S.A. American case studies and topic areas tend to pivot around urban renewal and deal with the very rundown, ghettoized downtown cores. Canadian cities, though more easily identified with, are still on a much larger scale than the small communities in northern Alberta. There are some very interesting periodicals available though, with Small Town U.S.A. and Heritage Canada being excellent examples. Both contain case studies of smaller communities and give ideas and suggestions for downtown and community improvements.

The available data can basically be broken down into covering two main categories: initiating downtown revitalization and implementing downtown revitalization, with the latter being the more expansive of the two.

Initiating Downtown Revitalization

Getting started appears to be the most difficult aspect of improving downtown. Several key ideas are apparent throughout the literature. An enthusiastic leader has been identified as the starting point in the revitalization process. That person must persuade and convince merchants that there is a problem or that the downtown could benefit from improvements. This hurdle proves the highest as merchants and store owners are, by their very nature, an independent group and may not initially be joiners or organizers.

However, their support and involvement is crucial. Only the merchants themselves can improve the business vitality of the downtown. And because the merchants stand to gain the most from a revitalized downtown, there should be a strong element of self-interest. Merchants have to recognize and be convinced that sales can be increased with training - be it in marketing, merchandising or staffing.

In some cases, it is the municipality that has identified the need for revitalization and which begins to implement improvements in the downtown. These solutions are generally physical in nature and might involve improved maintenance and general clean-up. Park benches and banners may also be included. This may stimulate the businessperson to carry out some improvements in his or her own business as well. Although all of these ideas are very positive and beneficial to the downtown area, the commitment and support of the merchants is still essential. The organization of a strong and active downtown merchant association has been recognized as an important factor in terms of a successful revitalization project.

However, the merchants cannot work in isolation. While the merchants may be the organizers, the public are the customers and the participants, and the elected officials are the legislators and the bankers. An organized and cooperative approach works best.

It is important to get a clear understanding of the downtown issues and concerns. Analyzing and reviewing what makes up the downtown is a first step to identifying problems and creating solutions. Quick, frantic activity has proven unsuccessful and, instead, thorough and methodical planning in the areas of economic development, land use and business development is recommended.

Implementing Downtown Revitalization

As was mentioned, downtown revitalization involves a number of components, which can be categorized into an economic component and a physical component.

- Economic Component

The economic aspect of revitalization includes a number of elements: promotions, marketing and business recruitment.

Promotions are those activities which serve to "promote" or sell the downtown. Activities and events geared toward encouraging and attracting

people to the downtown area are effective promotions. Every promotion "attendee" is a potential shopper. Promotions can be classified into three types: retail sales, special events and general promotional programs.[6] Retail sales involve the selling of merchandise at a reduced price. These sales are most effective when organized jointly with other merchants and when they reflect a theme, such as a sidewalk sale or Valentine's Day. Special event promotions can be held in conjunction with local community events such as rodeos or casino days or with traditional holidays. General promotional programs refer to ongoing activities or campaigns that create an image for the downtown as a unique area to shop. T-shirts or printed shopping bags are examples of a general promotion.

Marketing, an element of the economic component of downtown revitalization, can be discussed in two aspects: individual marketing and collective marketing.

Individually, each merchant must market his or her own business. The business should be encouraged to examine its practices and analyze its marketing techniques. Marketing includes each of six elements: the customer, the product, the price structure, the merchandise display, the advertising and the customer service. Seminars and advice can be offered to all merchants on such topics as window displays, staff training and effective advertising.

Shopping malls provide an excellent example of effective collective marketing techniques.[7] Standardized hours, coordinated sales, collective advertising and coordinated window displays are the four strategies downtowns could do well to adopt.

New businesses, that complement existing ones or provide new services to round out the merchandising mix, benefit the downtown in that empty buildings and lots are filled which, in turn, improves the downtown's image and provides the shopper with one more reason to go downtown. This is the objective of business recruitment. Thorough studies and business analyses are encouraged in order to assess the needs of the community in terms of goods and services and possible impacts.

Recent data suggest that 80% of new business development comes from within the community which leads to the further suggestion that the emphasis should be on encouraging local development. Marketing, promotions and business recruitment can give the downtown a new vitality and a new image. Economic results from a focus on these activities are becoming apparent in revitalizing communities and are discussed at length later in this report.

- Physical Component

The physical aspect of improving downtown has two focuses. The first is the public space (that area maintained by the municipality) and the second is the private space (the buildings or lots owned by private individuals). Both need to be dealt with in order to enhance the streetscape.

The public area generally has much room for improvement. Below are areas that could be considered public improvements:

- Parking - upgrade and expand
- Sidewalks - renew and widen
- Street furniture - park benches, garbages, planters, etc.
- Signage
- Greenery - additional plants and trees
- Parks - create or enhance
- Color - brighten downtown with banners or paint light poles

Encouraging individual businesses to enhance their own buildings is more difficult. The benefits of a well-maintained and attractive facade needs to be highlighted. Because the building is the first impression a customer receives of a business, it can be very influential. Sometimes all a facade needs is a new coat of paint and some general maintenance. Canopies have proven successful as a simple yet effective way to enhance a building and to coordinate the features of a number of individual buildings. Themes have been used in some communities where one specific time period or idea is chosen and reflected throughout the town. The

mountain community of Kimberly, B.C. is an excellent example. Their theme centres around a Swiss village atmosphere with complementary building facade designs. Although there are some very positive and successful examples of theme towns, some have proven disastrous. The Downtown Revitalization Program in B.C. recommends towns adopt a "clean theme" as opposed to a theme that may not reflect the real atmosphere of the community.

A downtown must be an inviting and attractive place to be. A downtown that cares about its image will care about its customers. Simple and visible changes need not be expensive to let the public know that something exciting is happening.

Success Factors

Throughout the literature, elements or components are identified that consistently appear in successful downtown revitalization projects. The following are some of those success factors:

- Concern for what is happening in the downtown
- Optimism and confidence that the downtown can be improved
- Commitment from the key players in the value of downtown and revitalization
- Local drive
- Cooperation and coordination among the downtown organizations
- Strong leadership
- Community participation
- Comprehensive plan including economic and physical components
- Strong, active downtown merchants' association
- Financial commitment from individual businesses
- Full-time management
- Business-like approach
- Support of the media
- Publicity through personal contact and newsletters
- Public partnership with the local municipality and other levels of government

Of the above, however, several of these components emerge as more than just success factors but "critical" success factors. In other words, their presence or absence has a definite effect on the long-term outcome of the revitalization project.

- Local drive

Any community engaging in a revitalization project must control the process itself. Discussing the concerns, understanding the problems, identifying the solutions and implementing the actions have to come from the local level if there is to be commitment and cooperation. The community will "buy into" the process much more readily if it has had input into analyzing the situation and deciding on a plan of action and has been convinced that there is a need. The Devonian Foundation with its Main Street Alberta program is an excellent example of a program that was not locally driven. Although there were some very positive results from participating communities, in some cases beautification projects were not maintained by the community and fell into a state of disrepair. These communities had not "bought into" the process and were not convinced of the need; hence their lack of commitment to the required maintenance. A revitalization program must allow the flexibility and freedom for communities to make decisions relevent to their situations.

- Commitment

A downtown revitalization project cannot succeed without commitment. There must be the belief, on the part of all of the key players, that with enough time, effort, and money, the downtown can be restored to its previous functional state. The businesspeople, municipal officials and the public must have sufficient faith in the downtown to see it through the long and sometimes trying process of revitalization and to allow time enough for the results of these efforts to become apparent. Revitalization is a long-term solution and maintaining momentum, enthusiasm and faith throughout the process is the ultimate test of commitment.

- Cooperation

Cooperation among the downtown organizations is crucial to a successful revitalization project. Each organization must give a little and take a little in an effort to overcome differences in working toward a common goal. Commitment is very related to cooperation since it is that long-term belief that revitalization is a worthwhile endeavor that encourages the opposing parties to come to an agreement and join forces for the benefit of downtown.

- Full-time management

Although some revitalization projects deemed successful have operated without a manager, persons involved have said they would certainly encourage the hiring of a coordinator next time. Downtown revitalization is a complex process which relies on such factors as communication and cooperation for success, and involves a myriad of organizations and personalities. Although it may be initiated by concerned individuals and volunteers, the complexities of revitalization can sometimes be overwhelming, not to mention time-consuming. It is for reasons such as these that hiring an employee to manage the project can be crucial to its success. Organizing promotions, monitoring activities, liaising with elected officials and organizations, and handling media is enough to burn out even the most dedicated of volunteers. As with the malls which have mall managers, so must downtown merchants hire a downtown manager. With the right person in the job, full-time management has been shown to be money well spent.

Summary

Although the literature is not expansive as it relates to the northern Alberta situation, some excellent material is available. Credit must be given to Revitalizing Downtown Alberta: A Self Help Action Kit as an excellent technical resource of up-to-date information.

Some key ideas are consistent throughout the literature, specifically success factors in downtown revitalization. Local drive, commitment, cooperation and full-time management emerge as critical success factors, essential in any revitalization endeavors.

6 "Technical Resource", Revitalizing Downtown Alberta: A Self Help Kit, Alberta Municipal Affairs, November 1985, pp. 142-147.

7 Ibid., pp. 166-171.

PROCESS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Introduction

Interviews with people experienced in downtown revitalization, as well as a review of the relevant literature, strongly indicate that a certain process must occur in order to successfully develop a strategy. The importance of developing an effective local process and the various stages of that process cannot be overstated. While the details of the process vary from situation to situation, there are some universal principles that must be followed.

The Process

Phase 1

- The Spark

Before the process can get started, something - "the spark" - has to occur to get the ball rolling. This can include hearing general criticisms or negative comments about the downtown, or a request from town council or the businesses to look further into the downtown situation. Case studies have shown that a perceived threatening situation, such as a proposal for a competing mall, can often serve as a catalyst for initiating businesses to action. Whatever the spark, the person or persons involved must be sufficiently persuasive to gain the total support and involvement of the local merchants for any revitalization activities to be successful.

- Explore Issues and Establish Support

Every successful revitalization project has to go through the stage of gaining local support. This involves bringing all the key community leaders onside, gaining support of the merchants themselves, obtaining the agreement of the local municipality, and often educating the public and eliciting support from the public-at-large. While this education and support is developing, it is also very important to explore all the issues involved in the project as well as to identify available resources. An identified need, community commitment and effective leadership are all essential for the initiation of a revitalization project.

- Establish Public Awareness and Interest

At this point, the issues and concerns should be identified in detail. Surveys of the general public, specifically aimed at the shoppers and the businesspeople can be conducted. Information on public issues and possible solutions as well as on the image the general public has of the downtown can be garnered.

- Goals and Objectives

With the collection of data, key issues and possible solutions, a strategy can be developed which includes the goals and objectives of the project. This information can be reviewed with public officials and will provide a focus for further activity.

The above points: the spark, exploring the issues, establishing public awareness and setting goals and objectives are all part of the initial phase as identified in "A Guide to Downtown Revitalization", a publication of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

Phase 2

- Establish an Organization

According to Keith Driver and Associates, this stage is the most critical as it establishes thrust, sets the goals and objectives, and gets others involved. The organization may be voluntary or committed, structured or unstructured; the format will depend on the defined problems, the set objectives and the desires of those involved. The main areas that the organization would deal with initially would probably include administration, public liaison, finance, marketing and the media. As the process develops and plans are implemented, other areas and committees could be added.

Phase 3

- Prepare Project Outline and Budget

The parameters of the revitalization project might be outlined in a project strategy which would be a detailed report covering a number of areas, including:

- A description of the area
- An outline of existing problems
- The goals and objectives
- The revitalization concept
- A budget
- A set of recommendations for implementation

A plan of this nature could be done by a committee or a consultant. Costs would vary dependent on the complexity of the chosen project or phase.

A budget should be established to cover probable costs for the first year of operation and possibly include future related costs. Funding sources and programs can be identified at that point.

Phase 4

- Implementing the Revitalization Project

The plans indentified in the project strategy can now be implemented. Committees may be set up to deal with specific activities such as marketing, promotions and so on. This can be a difficult phase as it is hard to keep up momentum; project commitment is vital during this stage. Also included here is the establishing of any bylaws or legislative framework for raising funds for the implementation of the project if the community has decided on that route.

Phase 5

- Monitoring the Project

No plan is complete without a method to evaluate the activity and ensure that the needs are being met. In order to keep projects within a budget and on a schedule, continual monitoring, coordinating and communicating are crucial.

The following table, as adapted from "A Guide to Downtown Revitalization", summarizes the main steps and components. Again, it is important to reiterate that each community must decide on its own approach to a revitalization project, since unique problems, concerns and participants must demand individual approaches.

Summary

Successful revitalization programs typically have a strong local organization, usually some form of a merchants' association. There is support for the program among the merchants themselves as well as support from the local governments and the community-at-large. There tends to be good organization and leadership involved.

What is critical to the attainment of these and other important features of effective revitalization projects, is that a process has to occur. Downtown revitalization must be a locally driven program initiated, developed, and operated by the community itself. If the key steps or principles are followed in developing a program, chances for success are much higher.

PHASES AND MAIN STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION *

SUMMARY

Main Steps		Components	Organization
PHASE 1	Initial Step	• Spark or catalyst occurs • Explore the issues, establish initial support and identify problem • Establish public awareness • Establish goals and objectives	Key interested persons should involve municipality and public
PHASE 2	Establishing an Organization	• Set general goals and objectives • Get community involved	Business committee must involve municipality and public. "Advisers" -- consultants, planning commission, municipal affairs staff
PHASE 3	Preparing Project Outline and Budget	• Project report including area description, outline of problems, goals and objectives, revitalization concept, recommendations • Budget required to carry out above plan	Business committee sets parameters and budget. "Advisers" consultant can package program identify activities, sources, approach, etc.
PHASE 4	Implementing the Revitalization Project	• Set up committees • Establish by-laws and legislation necessary to raise funds	Business committee Various sub-committees Municipality Business Committee and elected officials
PHASE 5	Monitor Project	• Evaluation • Continued coordination communication and liaison	Various sub-committees Municipality

* As adapted from "A Guide to Downtown Revitalization".

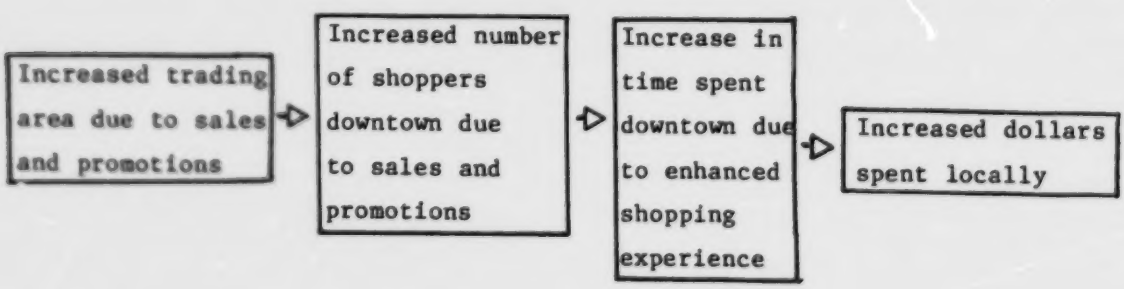
ECONOMICS OF DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Why Revitalize?

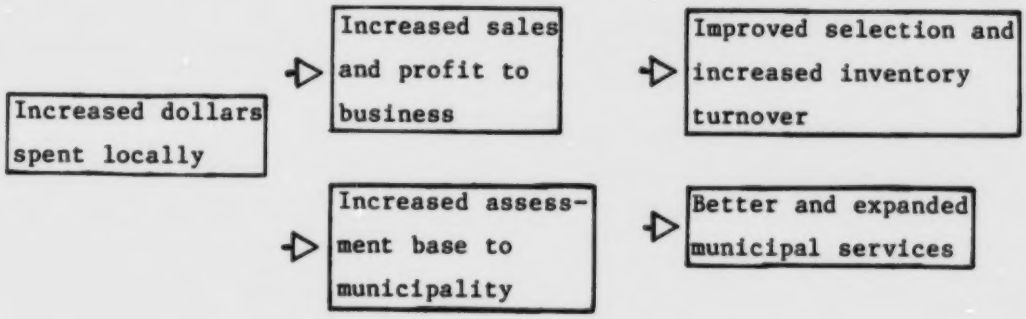
In many communities downtown is not the vibrant centre it once was. Depressing economic conditions, competition from malls and regional shopping centres, and business complacency and lethargy can all contribute to its deterioration. Physically, some downtowns are falling into a state of disrepair.

Downtown revitalization can help to reverse this trend. A strong, comprehensive program including economic and physical activities can bring downtowns back to the functional state they were once in. A revitalized downtown shows that the businesses do care.

Joint promotions and sales, more effective marketing techniques and an inviting and attractive downtown all work toward enhancing and improving business sales. A revitalized downtown serves to increase the number of people downtown. Promotions, sales and improved customer service encourage more local shoppers and may also draw shoppers from outside of the established trading area. By enhancing the shopping experience, those same shoppers may stay downtown for a longer time period. Consequently, by increasing both the number of shoppers and the time periods spent shopping, it becomes easier to achieve the desired goal of revitalization: to increase business sales. These two factors also have the effect of decreasing business leakage, that is, rather than buying goods from larger centres, shoppers will buy more locally.


Increased trading area due to sales and promotions
Increased number of shoppers downtown due to sales and promotions
Increase in time spent downtown due to enhanced shopping experience
Increased dollars spent locally

The businesses benefit from a revitalized downtown because higher sales equals more profit which can translate into increased inventory turnover or expanded selection; the municipality benefits from a stabilized or increased assessment base; and the public benefits from increased options for goods and services as well as better and expanded municipal services.


Increased dollars spent locally
Increased sales and profit to business
Improved selection and increased inventory turnover
Increased assessment base to municipality
Better and expanded municipal services

Towns with successful revitalization programs have also realized other spin-off effects such as increased tourism activity, the attraction of new businesses and economic diversification.

Some Key Indicators of Successful Revitalization

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing in Ontario has outlined indicators to measure the success of revitalization activities in communities.[8] These are listed below:

- Increased business revenue or profitability
  - Increase in share of market
  - More customers for non-retail business as well as retail

- Greater demand for business space
  - Decreased vacancy levels
  - New development
  - Quicker occupation of vacated space

- New businesspersons involved in downtown
  - Number of openings and types of new businesses
  - Sales of existing businesses to newcomers

- Increased returns from downtown property
  - Rent levels
  - Realty and business assessment

- Greater private renovation
  - Increases in property values

- More people downtown
  - Traffic, pedestrian counts

- Improved community attitudes to downtown
  - Measures of political support
  - Media coverage
  - Attitude surveys

- Better support for downtown organization
  - Attendance at meetings
  - Attitude of other community organizations

Revitalization Results

The economic results tabulated in many communities involved in revitalization activities, both in Canada and the United States, are impressive. Even though it was recognized that much of the effect of revitalization efforts would probably not be seen immediately, results are already becoming apparent.

At present B.C. Municipal Affairs is completing a study of the physical and economic impact that revitalization has had in the community.[9] A cross-section of six communities was looked at in depth. The initial results are revealing. With regard to sales figures, many businesses felt there was an increase in sales since the revitalization project began. Chemainus had the most dramatic results with a full 84% of the businesses reporting sales increases. Campbell River had 42% of its businesses reporting increases; Courtney - 50%; Trail - 57%; Grand Forks - 27%; and Rosslynn - 38%.

Chemainus had other significant figures from the study. Fifty-eight percent of existing businesses hired new staff. Forty new businesses opened up in one year. The tax assessment base in Chemainus went up 600%.

Results from communities involved in the Main Street Canada Program also support the fact that economic improvements occur with revitalization efforts.[10] Perth, Ontario has had 15 new businesses open up downtown and has seen the creation of 66 new jobs three years after it became a Main Street community. Three years ago, Fort Macleod had eight retail vacancies in its downtown. Now it has filled seven of those vacancies plus it has added 15 new businesses. The Fort Macleod Main Street office coordinates a number of promotions for the community. Initially four promotions were held annually but now there are up to 37 promotions. One of the more successful attractions is the theatre group that drew 1,500 visitors when it started. Now, four years later, the theatre group is a major tourist attraction, drawing 15,000 visitors annually from both within and outside Canada. Tourists are travelling to Fort Macleod and bringing their friends - just to visit the theatre.

Old Strathcona, in Edmonton, is another excellent example of a successful revitalization project.[11] Although initially based on preserving historical buildings, the Old Strathcona Foundation (OSF) has also restored storefronts and sidewalks, and organizes a number of promotions, including the much touted Fringe Festival which brings thousands of people into the community every summer. In five years, the Fringe has increased its attendance revenues from $30,000 to $200,000 and its attendance has increased from 7,500 visitors to 119,000. In the last two years, 80 new businesses have opened up in the Strathcona section. The Old Strathcona Foundation is now moving away from the historical aspects of the area and is instead concentrating on improving the streets and businesses, holding sidewalk sales and conducting effective advertising campaigns. In other words, the priority now is to improve what is already there.

Red Deer passed a BRZ bylaw in January 1984.[12] In three years, the main floor vacancy rate has decreased from 23% to less than 1%. Sixty-two new businesses have started in the downtown, an additional 16 professional offices have opened, and 20 business expansions have taken place. The BRZ association estimates 225 jobs have been created since 1984. Private sector investment has been encouraged and approximately $6.5 million have been spent by the private sector on such physical improvements as facade treatment, interior renovations and expansions. The BRZ association initially started with 279 members but interest and enthusiasm from businesses outside of the BRZ zone convinced the board to expand its boundaries; now there are 429 members in the BRZ association.

Cost of Revitalization

It is clear that downtown revitalization has a positive influence on a number of economic indicators in the community: increased new business activity, increased pedestrian and traffic counts, increased assessment base, increased tourism activity, and decreased vacancy rates. However, as it is the merchant who will be paying for much of the cost of the revitalization projects which may include new sidewalks, repaving streets, ornamental lights, street furniture and greenery, the merchant must determine if the cost of revitalization is worth it. In an effort to provide retailers with just that information, the Downtown Revitalization Program in B.C. outlined a sample cost-benefit analysis to give these businesspeople an indication of the cost and the resulting possible tax impact using their revitalization program and the financing available for revitalization capital projects.[13] (Please refer to "Downtown Revitalization Programs" for further detail.)

Downtown Revitalization - Sample Calculation of Tax Impact

A.	Project Cost	$500,000
B.	Financing	
	(i) 75% by province of B.C.	375,000
	(ii) 25% by Municipal Finance Authority (MFA)	125,000
		500,000
C.	Annual Financing Cost	
	(i) Provincial loan at say, 9.5% for 10 years (average interest rate)	59,700
	(ii) MFA loan at say, 13% for 10 years	23,500
		83,200
D.	Taxable Assessed Value of Area	9,000,000
E.	Cost per Thousand per Annum of Assessed Value	
	$83,200 ÷ 9,000 = $9.25	

EXAMPLE	Annual Cost for an Individual Property		
	Actual value of property	250,000	
	Assessed value, say	62,500	
	Annual taxes for project		
	$62,500 ÷ 1000 x 9.25 =	$588.13	per annum
		or $48.18	per month

In this example, the merchant with an assessed property of $62,500 will pay $9.25 per thousand per annum of that assessed value to total $578.13 of increased taxes per year for 10 years. Downtown revitalization has been shown to have a positive influence on business sales, with many merchants in revitalized communities reporting increased sales. In our example, if that merchant has $100,000 in gross sales annually, even a minimal increase in business sales will cover the cost of the revitalization.

Annual Gross Sales	Percent Sales Increase	Ratio of Cost of Revitalization	to	Sales Increase
102,000	2%	$1.00	:	$3.46
105,000	5%	$1.00	:	$8.65
110,000	10%	$1.00	:	$17.29
115,000	15%	$1.00	:	$25.95

In the above calculation, if the merchant's gross sales increase by 2% annually, the merchant is showing a 346% return on the investment. By investing one dollar the business has brought in $3.46. If the merchant feels that the return is worth it, revitalization will appear a sound investment.

Economic Conditions and Revitalization

Economic conditions tend to influence business operations. In depressing economic times and periods of slow down, many businesses have a difficult time making ends meet; some businesses are fighting merely to stay alive. In times of depressing economic conditions, the argument goes: how can businesses be expected to pay more money for revitalization projects? To answer that, it is exactly times like these when businesses need to band together and take constructive steps to improve their situation and outlook.

Joint promotions and advertising are actually cheaper when done as a group. For example, dividing the cost of one page of advertising by 20 businesses is less expensive than a quarter-page ad paid by one business. Business programs such as the Management Assistance Program (MAP) offered by Alberta Economic Development and Trade, provide relevant information catering to the needs of the individual business. Consultants, through this program, are available to review operations and financial records and make recommendations for improvements. Hospitality training is also available to businesses and staff through Alberta Tourism. Improving customer relations and service is an inexpensive yet effective way to ensure repeat business.

There is an increasing body of evidence which indicates that effective revitalization programs can in fact be a partial solution to economic slowdowns. The increased business activities which can occur with sound revitalization projects translate directly into increased sales, employment opportunities and new businesses. Physical improvements and capital projects, both public and private, can increase materials sales and provide construction activity. Funds invested in such programs by businesses, as well as local senior governments, can be returned many times over when viewed in this larger economic context.

Summary

Downtown revitalization has been shown to have a positive effect on communities involved in economic and physical improvements. Increasing the number of shoppers downtown and the length of time the shoppers spend downtown can translate into higher sales for the businesses. Higher sales lead to expanded inventory and also an increased municipal assessment base - both benefiting the public.

Impressive supporting data from revitalized communities engaging in comprehensive downtown plans are becoming apparent. The number of new businesses started, jobs created and sales increases all lend credence to the fact that downtown revitalization can be a strong economic stimulator for a community.

Slow or depressed economic times are often opportune times for businesses and municipalities to mount effective revitalization programs. The costs associated with revitalization can be more than compensated by increased economic activity in the way of sales, profits, jobs, tax assessment and new businesses.

[8] Towards Excellence in Downtown Management, Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, December 1983, p. 13.

[9] Personal Interview with Downtown Revitalization Program Administration Officials Regarding a Draft Report, November 4, 1986.

[10] "Technical Resource", Revitalizing Downtown Alberta: A Self Help Kit, Alberta Municipal Affairs, pp. 136-138.

[11] "Promoting Trendy History", Alberta Report, December 29, 1986, p.8.

[12] Personal Interview with Red Deer BRZ Manager, January 12, 1986.

[13] Downtown: Its Images and Its Merchants, British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs, pp. 10-11.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAMS

Introduction

A report entitled Comparing Alberta Program Initiatives with Other Provinces was recently completed by the Inter-Agency Planning Branch of the Department of Municipal Affairs. In this report, as the title suggests, downtown revitalization initiatives in each province were identified and compared with Alberta's initiatives. The forms of assistance required by communities to revitalize were identified and broken into three main headings:

- Legislation - Enabling revitalization activity to be implemented and financed locally
- Technical and organizational support - Provided to local organizations before, during and after revitalization projects
- Financial assistance - For capital works and other projects

The study surveyed six provinces, including B.C., Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Only Manitoba, among those with revitalization programs, was not represented. A summary of the results of this study can be found in Appendix D.

In an attempt not to duplicate these efforts, a decision was made to focus on three specific and comprehensive programs, namely the Downtown Revitalization Program in B.C., the Main Street Program in Nova Scotia and the program of Heritage Canada - Main Street Canada. A brief summary and update of the remaining provincial programs will be included.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Introduction

British Columbia started its Downtown Revitalization Program (DRP) in 1980. The program operates under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs with funds made available through the 1980 Special Funds Act. Several premises are inherent in the program and are reflected in the program structure.[14]

- The decline of downtowns is reversible.
- The good health of the downtown areas benefits the quality of life of all B.C. residents.
- There is pride in accomplishment.

The Downtown Revitalization Program (DRP) recognizes that revitalization does not only include physical beautification, but also organization, planning, promotion and commitment from local communities. With respect to the latter, the community is encouraged to establish a downtown merchant association as a first step to revitalizing its downtown. At the request of the merchant association or the municipality, a presentation will be made to the community by Municipal Affairs outlining the DRP and funding available to the community, as well as the recommended initial steps to take.

Objective

The objective of the DRP is to assist municipalities and businesspeople in the rejuvenation of core areas through promotion, facade improvements and municipal improvements.[15]

Eligibility

All B.C. municipalities are eligible for the revitalization program. The first step is to pass a resolution by council designating the boundaries of the downtown area for revitalizing. Sixty-six percent of the merchants within that area must be in agreement and support the application. When the Minister grants the designation, the municipality can then access the funding available through the funding components.

Legislation

At this point, B.C. does not have legislation in place for local businesses to levy against themselves in order to finance revitalization activities. However, this has been recognized as desirable and steps are being taken to establish legislation similar to the Business Improvement Area (BIA) or Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) legislation found in Ontario and Alberta respectively.

Funding

The Downtown Revitalization Program operates on a budget of $5 million annually, $1 million of which are used for promotion and facade grants. The remaining $4 million are in a revolving fund and are used for the Capital Improvement loans. Approximately $3 million are returned annually through municipality loan payments. Please refer to Appendix E for details on program funding components.

Summary

The research team had the opportunity for a field trip to B.C. to see, first hand, the application of this program within the community. Four actual projects were visited, those being Chemainus, Duncan, Ladysmith and Victoria. The team could not help but be impressed with the spirit and enthusiasm generated from the local townspeople in those communities. Local residents interviewed were very positive about both economic and physical improvements in the community as well as the program that helped in their achievements.

As mentioned, economic results from six B.C. communities involved in an in-depth study are showing very positive and impressive data.

Although not the purpose of the study, results are showing that revitalization is affecting tourism with three out of the six communities reporting an increase in tourist trade.

Critical success factors were identified by the communities and included the following:

- Cooperative attitude
- Participation
- Research and planning
- Commitment to the plan
- Project coordination
- Professional assistance
- Comprehensive look at both physical and economic goals
- Flexible program administration

An additional success factor, noted by the research team, was that of the revitalization initiative being driven locally. The emphasis on a strong and active downtown merchants' association, and the requirement of a 66% majority of businesses in support of program application is indicative of the underlying theme. The self-help belief is reflected throughout the revitalization program.

The program administrator indicated that a further benefit to downtown revitalization is starting to become apparent - that being a restored confidence in the economy. Shoppers are tending to spend more in a revitalized community. Results appear to show increased spending locally as well as a maintenance of regional spending. That is, increased local spending is not detracting from the amount shoppers previously spent in larger, urban centres, but is in addition to it. There appears to be an attitudinal change as well as an economic benefit.

Although the Downtown Revitalization Program appeared to cover all bases, some suggestions for improvements were identified:

- Provide partial funding for a coordinator for each project.
- Provide legislation, such as the BIA or BRZ, and encourage its use.
- Increase the amount of the start-up grant from the present $5,000 to $7,000.

B.C. has taken a very adaptive and flexible approach to the administration of this program. Changes have been made along the way to better meet the needs of the communities. As an example, the B.C. government has recently announced a new program - Profiles in Partnership. This is an Economic Development program that evolved from the downtown revitalization projects. The process of moving from downtown development to community development is starting to occur in B.C. and Profiles in Partnership has been created to assist in that process. This serves to reinforce the growing evidence that downtown revitalization is highly interrelated with economic improvements.

To date, the B.C. Downtown Revitalization Program has 60 projects underway or completed in 50 municipalities. Of the 134 municipalities in the province, 120 (or 90%) have received the start-up grant and are in the process of organizing and preparing for further assistance. The Downtown Revitalization program appears to have captured some key elements that are attributing much to its success. This program is well worth watching.

NOVA SCOTIA

Introduction

The Mainstreet Program (MSP) in Nova Scotia has been in place since 1978 and is operated under the Provincial Department of Development.[16] Co-operation and organization among all the key players are felt to be the key to success in downtown revitalization. As with the Downtown Revitalization Program in B.C., physical improvements are not done in isolation but are coupled with promotional efforts, staff development and upgrading of business, marketing and operating techniques.

The Mainstreet Program has two main prerequisites in order for a community to be eligible for the program.

First of all, the community must form an organization to which responsibility is given to administer the MSP. This organization, referred to as the Business Improvement District Committee (BID Committee), is charged with a number of responsibilities, including defining the boundaries of the downtown within which improvement projects are eligible for funding. This area is called the Business Improvement District (BID). As revitalization occurs in a community, other organizations may evolve. A Downtown Development Corporation may be formed, composed of and financially supported by private sector persons. The other option is a Business Improvement Development Commission (BID Commission) which is legislated to allow downtown businesspeople to tax themselves to raise money for land acquisition, improvement projects and promotions.

The second prerequisite for eligibility to the MSP is the collection of a Downtown Data Base, consisting of two main areas. The Economic Data Base shows the BID boundary plus the total commercial assessment. The Business Survey garners issues and concerns from the businesses within the BID and points out areas requiring attention.

Objective

The objective of the Main Street Program is to improve the physical, economic and social environment in the downtown areas while at the same time creating jobs.

Legislation

As noted, legislation is in place through the Business Improvement District Commission (BID Commission) for downtown businesspeople to pay a special commercial tax to acquire land, implement improvement projects and organize promotions.

Funding

The Mainstreet Program has a budget of approximately $3 million annually which goes directly to the community. This does not include administrative or staffing costs. Although the budget is received annually, it is possible to make multi-year commitments. Please refer to Appendix E for details on program funding components.

Summary

The MSP has evolved since its inception eight years ago. The Mainstreet staff meets with and listens to community concerns and adapts the program to meet these needs. The Village Square Program, a new labor-intensive funding program for rural communities, is a recent example. The MSP is dealing with 58 communities at present.

HERITAGE CANADA

Introduction

Main Street Canada is one of five programs operated by the Heritage Canada Foundation, a national non-profit foundation dedicated to preserving historic resources across Canada. Although Heritage Canada has been around since 1973, the Main Street Canada program was started in 1980 in an effort to preserve historic buildings in the downtown area.

The philosophy of Heritage Canada is to preserve the living past through the revitalization of the main streets of the nation and to do it slowly through local endeavor and local initiative.[17] This is reflected in the Main Street Program through a strong focus on the elements of community involvement and self-help.

Four main components make up the Main Street Canada Program:

- Organization - A coordinator is employed to bring business, government, owners and associations together to work on downtown issues in a cooperative effort.

- Promotion - Downtown is marketed as a desirable place for shopping, business and recreation. Special events are held to draw the public to the downtown.

- Design - The streetscape, which includes the physical aspects of downtown such as sidewalks, lights, greenery, and signage, is worked on; improved facades and storefronts are also encouraged.

- Commercial and economic development - New businesses are recruited and vacant buildings are occupied. Individual businesses can get assistance and training in effective business techniques.

Objective

The objective of Main Street Canada is simply stated: to help communities revitalize main street.

Eligibility

Any community is eligible to apply to Main Street Canada although the following criteria are reviewed and applied to each application:

- Commitment from the town and businesses
- Organization among all of the key players
- Financial support for a coordinator's salary and office for three years
- Agreement to adhere to Main Street Canada's four-point approach
- Community heritage

Funding

The funding for the Main Street Canada program is provided through the federal Department of Tourism and the Department of Regional Industrial Expansion. The budget for the program over the next six years - to 1991 - is $5 million. There is a goal of 70 Main Street Communities by 1991. Please refer to Appendix E for details on program funding components.

Summary

From 1981 to 1985, seven communities across Canada were involved in Main Street Canada pilot projects. The future goal is that by 1991, 70 additional communities will have benefited from the program. Each region handles a maximum of eight Main Street projects at any one time.

Indications are that Main Street communities are attracting large numbers of international travellers. Tourists coming to Canada like to see our heritage and culture, and programs offering this information are very popular.

A monitoring system is in place to keep track of the activities of the Main Street communities with a future goal to have annual reports available for each project to summarize the year's highlights and successes.

OTHER PROVINCIAL PROGRAMS

At present, of the 10 provinces, four provinces do not specifically have a downtown revitalization program. These include:

- Alberta
- Newfoundland
- Prince Edward Island
- Saskatchewan - Its Main Street Program was discontinued in 1983.

The following is a brief, updated summary on the remaining provinces:

Quebec

Quebec's program, Revicentre, will end in 1987.[18] The cut-off date for applications was March 1985. It has dealt with 88 communities and provided a 50% grant system. Funding was used for planning and public improvements.

Quebec also has legislation to allow business districts to create non-profit corporations to promote commercial areas. These are called SIDACS (Law on Initiative and Development Associations for Commercial Streets). Thirty have been organized thus far. Promotions, marketing and customer services are eligible for project funding.

Manitoba

Main Street Manitoba provides a funding program for two-thirds of the eligible costs of municipal improvements including parks, lighting, signage, landscaping, and parking.[19] Private improvements to storefronts can receive one-third of the cost, to a maximum of $500 for facade development. Mainly focusing on beautification, the four-year-old program is now winding down. It has been involved in about 50 Manitoba communities.

New Brunswick

The Mainstreet Program in New Brunswick has as its objective to improve, beautify and revitalize the downtown area in a planned and coordinated manner.[20] Eligibility for funding components necessitates the formation of a BIA. Three components are available.

- Planning Assistance - To produce a medium to long-term Commercial Rehabilitation Plan, which is a prerequisite for funds

- BIA grant - To implement the Commercial Rehabilitation Plan for those public area physical improvements that are in addition to normal maintenance

- Storefront grant - To encourage private property improvement to complete public area improvements

The Mainstreet program has been available for three years and 14 communities have participated. Physical improvements appear to be the main focus.

Ontario

The Business Improvement Area or BIA legislation has played a lead role in revitalization legislation in Canada. The BIA carries out such activities as physical improvements and beautification for municipal property as well as promotion of the BIA area.[21]

Once a BIA is established, the community is then eligible to apply for funding under the Commercial Area Improvement Program - CAIP.[22] The objective of CAIP is to act as a catalyst to upgrade older commercial districts by providing funds for municipal services, parking, and aesthetic and economic improvements. The Ontario government provides 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of $500,000. One-third of this contribution can be as a grant and the remaining two-thirds as a loan repaid over a maximum of ten years. The areas available for funding include administration, services and utilities, parking, aesthetics and small anchor redevelopment projects.

Summary

The three programs highlighted - B.C., Nova Scotia and Heritage Canada - are examples of comprehensive programs encompassing the key components of successful revitalization including economic strategies such as promotions and marketing, along with physical improvements.

The three programs are also similar in their belief in self-help and the value of organization and commitment which starts at the community level- Nova Scotia requires the enactment of a BIA; B.C. residents must pass a resolution in council with 66% majority; and Main Street Canada communities must demonstrate their commitment.

Hiring coordinators is also recognized as a priority for revitalization projects. Nova Scotia provides 50% of a coordinator's salary; Main Street Canada requires a community to come up with 100% of the salary costs. B.C. does not require a coordinator be hired but recognizes the value and encourages it.

Promotions and marketing are highlighted and make up a major focus of the programs. Funding is provided from B.C. and Nova Scotia; Main Street Canada encourages the promotional activities through the coordinator position.

It should be noted that, while the research to complete this report was being conducted, it became apparent that there was a lack of precise statistical data regarding the actual impact of revitalization on the local community.

Both B.C. and Nova Scotia are in the process of completing studies in their respective provinces. Main Street Canada does collect some figures and hopes to develop annual reports for each community to review the year's activities and successes. However, outside of some promising preliminary statistics from the B.C. program, little evaluative information is available.

Measurement and evaluation are essential. Because of this shortfall, it was difficult to get much more than a feeling or impression of the effect that revitalization is having. Conversations with the coordinators of the three main programs seem to indicate a relationship between revitalization and tourism. This was specifically mentioned by administrators of the B.C. and Main Street Canada Programs. Improvements in the economy also appear related to revitalization according to Nova Scotia and some impressive figures from B.C. The completion of these studies should verify and confirm these indicators. It must also be noted that some of the effects of revitalization may not be known for several years.

In conclusion, six provinces currently have downtown revitalization programs of some type. Obviously, other governments feel that there is value in providing funding for these initiatives. The following chapters indentify the degree to which the province of Alberta is involved in downtown revitalization.

14 "Downtown Revitalization Program - An Introduction," British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs, p. 2.

15 "Downtown Revitalization Program - A Guide," British Columbia Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

16 "Mainstreet Program Guide 1986/87," Nova Scotia Department of Development, 1986.

17 "Downtown Improvement Program Workshop," Town of Peace River Economic Development Board, January 29, 1985.

18 "Mainstreeting Provincial Style", Main Street, the Heritage Canada Foundation, March-April 1986, Vol.2, No.2.

19 Ibid.

20 "New Brunswick Main Street Program Administration Guide," Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment, pp. 1-8.

21 "Mainstreeting - Provincial Style".

22 "Commercial Area Improvement Program Administrative Outline," Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs.

NORTHERN ALBERTA REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES

Introduction

A study of downtown revitalization in northern Alberta would not be complete without a review of the downtown revitalization initiatives presently being taken by northern Alberta communities and the issues and concerns northern communities have regarding this topic. Case studies on key northern communities as well as results from a community indicator survey follow.

Grande Prairie

The city of Grande Prairie has been an Alberta leader in the area of downtown revitalization dating as far back as 1972. During that year, downtown businesses were faced with the threat of a regional mall development on the outskirts of the city. Banding together, the merchants challenged the land rezoning for the mall. They lost the battle but didn't give up the fight. Even though the Prairie Mall was built, downtown businesses continued with their organization. The Central Business Association (CBA) was a voluntary organization of property owners with a fee based on land tax. As the CBA evolved, provision was made for property renters in the downtown area to join. The activities of the CBA included promotions, marketing, beautification, and parking redevelopment. Being a voluntary organization, membership was not mandatory. This limited the amount of funds that could be collected and ultimately limited the budget. However, a part-time manager was hired to keep records and minutes, and organize activities. Office space was donated.

When the Devonian Program was made available, Grande Prairie sent representatives to make a presentation to the Devonian group for funds. Grande Prairie received a grant of $500,000 for beautification activities in the downtown. Parking, underground wiring, decorative lighting and street furniture were some of the projects completed.

In 1982, at a conference in Ontario, interest was stimulated in the Business Improvement Area (BIA) legislation available in Ontario. Several reciprocal visits between Ontario and Grande Prairie, consultant studies, and meetings with government officials resulted in a private member's bill being initiated to the Alberta Legislature requesting the implementation of legislation similar to that of Ontario: Business Revitalization Zones. The BRZ legislation became official in 1983 and allows for businesspeople to levy a tax on themselves to raise funds for revitalization activities.

The Grande Prairie BRZ Association was formed in January 1984 to formalize the organization and structure of the CBA and ensure a constant and reliable funding mechanism. Initially with 220 members, the BRZ association now has 263 members and a planned 1987 operating budget of $87,500. In 1985, Grande Prairie became a Main Street Canada community. The association has hired a manager and a part-time secretary to carry out promotions and activities. Farmers markets, Vegas Night and Frontier Days are some examples of the promotion events held. As well, the BRZ manager has implemented a "Block Captain Network" whereby each block organizes its own special activities that take place around its own block. According to the BRZ manager the BRZ association provides the equivalent of shopping mall services and promotions at a much lower cost.

The BRZ recognizes some needs at this point, to help them in their endeavors. A technical design person would be very useful for facade and streetscape work on a part time or temporary basis. Incentives to encourage businesses to complete facade improvements could also stimulate physical improvements downtown. In 1985, a consultant study identified several areas for physical enhancement downtown although funding for these projects have yet to be identified.

The Grande Prairie experience with the BRZ legislation has been and continues to be highly successful. Ground floor vacancy rates have been reduced from 10% in 1983 to virtually 0% now and the BRZ office alone created nine jobs this summer for activities in the downtown areas. The BRZ Association views the downtown as a community resource, something that should be developed and protected.

Peace River

Peace River is another northern community heavily involved in the revitalization process. In 1981, a mall development was proposed on the outskirts of the community. As in Grande Prairie, this motivated businesspeople to join forces to protect the downtown. When the mall proposal fell through, interest in revitalization waned for the majority of those involved but a key group of businesspeople, realizing there were other concerns, continued discussing downtown issues. Information meetings were held with interested organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Town Council, the Economic Development Board, and the Planning Commission. Business and consumer surveys were conducted, a downtown study was undertaken by the University of Calgary, and workshops were held on the BRZ legislation and the Main Street Canada program. The aforementioned activities were sponsored by both the Town of Peace River and the MacKenzie Regional Planning Commission.

In 1985, after considerable discussion, various key organizations decided to amalgamate to form one board, have one voice and work together for the continued betterment and development of Peace River. Thus was born the Peace River Board of Trade, formerly the Chamber of Commerce, the Economic Development Board and the Peace River Business Association.

Peace River became a Main Street Canada town in 1985, and at that time the Board of Trade hired a manager to be responsible for downtown revitalization and economic development. Also, a design assistant has been provided by the MacKenzie Regional Planning Commission for advice on streetscape and individual building design.

In keeping with the four-point comprehensive program of Main Street Canada, Peace River Board of Trade has completed activities under each category, some of which are included below:

Organizational

- Established aphepical office in August 1985 with a full-time manager
- Established a technical steering committee to address physical improvement
- Completed a study undertaken by the Main Street Canada Resource Team
- Received resource material and training from Main Street Canada
- Produced five newsletters
- Increased Board of Trade membership by 36%

Promotions and Events

- Santa Claus parade attracting 4,000 - 5,000 people
- Peace River Christmas Shopping Festival, Casino Night, Farmer/Merchant curling bonspiel, Trade Fair 1986, River Daze activities
- Trade and Commerce magazine naming Peace River as Town of the Year
- Volunteer Appreciation Night
- Trash - A - Thon

Commercial and Economic Development

- D.A. Thomas Riverboat project including consultant feasibility study
- Business Incubator feasibility project
- Market Garden Industry Task Force
- Conference hosting and sponsorship

Design

- $180,000 parking lot paving project
- Resource team report card on physical improvements
- Part-time design assistant for facade and signage improvements

Peace River has undertaken a variety of activities and physical improvements. The board of trade has additional projects planned and is presently looking for funding to assist in their completion.

Grimshaw

In May 1986, as a result of conversations between the chamber of commerce and the economic development board, a downtown revitalization committee was formed. The Main Street Revival committee consisted of 12 representatives from the town council, chamber of commerce, recreation board, economic development board and service clubs. Initial activities included identifying priorities and objectives, and surveying the public and businesses. Four committees were formed within the Main Street Revival: marketing, promotions, physical improvements and business recruitment. Because of the size of the organization, the "Revival" was streamlined to include committee members who were there because they wanted to be and not only as a representative of another organization. Now, with six people involved, the Main Street Revival is more effective in its operations.

Plans for 1987 include holding promotions, organizing seminars and training sessions for businesses, and completing such physical improvements as mini-parks, street lights, and a civic focus in the downtown. A downtown logo is also being designed.

Main Street Revival is presently quite an informal organization operating with dedicated volunteers. Legislative options may be recommended, however, if the present system loses its effectiveness. Hiring a full-time coordinator has been identified as a need that is becoming more evident as the activities increase. Grimshaw has an active and enthusiastic group in its Main Street Revival, important componants in a successful revitalization project.

Other Northern Communities

There is much interest and activity in other northern Alberta communities.

- Fort McMurray

The Downtown Business Association (DBA) of Fort McMurray is in the process of initiating a Business Revitalization Zone and is presently drafting the bylaw with the city. One hundred businesses signed the petition for a BRZ bylaw, the zoning of which could affect about 350 businesses. The Downtown Business Association is currently trying to find out what other BRZ communities in the province are doing. Once the BRZ is in place, the DBA plans to "tread softly" for the first year, initially collecting a minimal tax from its members. Fort McMurray has already implemented some physical improvements in the downtown area, including hanging banners and constructing new sidewalks.

- St. Paul

St. Paul is very interested in downtown revitalization and has appointed a sub-committee of the Downtown Business Committee to do a report on the resources available to them for revitalization activities. The Downtown Business Committee has the full support of the Town Council and is working closely with council.

- Beaverlodge

Beaverlodge is another progressive community that has shown interest and conducted activities with regard to downtown revitalization. Beaverlodge has been working with the South Peace Planning Commission in completing a downtown design plan, focusing on an historical theme. Some individual businesses have redone their store fronts; others have had design plans drawn. Beaverlodge continues to look for funding sources to help in the completion of their planned projects.

The Community Indicator Survey

The steering committee felt that a survey of northern communities would be important in order to get an indication of community interests and needs. Thus, a telephone survey was conducted. It involved all northern towns and villages with populations of 1,000 or more (based on data in the Inventory of Infrastructure, Northern Development Branch 1985). In all, 26 communities were surveyed. One individual was interviewed per centre, that person being the town manager or administrator. It was felt that this person would have a good indication of what was happening in the community from many vantages. In one case, a chamber of commerce president was interviewed as the town administrator was on holidays. Contact was also made with the regional economic development officer in those areas with such an office. These discussions supplemented the community data.

A list of the communities and contacts is found in Appendix A and a copy of the survey in Appendix B. A full and detailed reporting of the complete survey results is included as Appendix C of this report.

Survey Results

A number of significant and recurring themes emerged from the northern communities regarding downtown revitalization issues and concerns.

A full 96% of all northern towns surveyed have active chambers of commerce or boards of trade operating within their communities. This indicates some existing organization and interest among the businesses.

There appears to be good activity in the area of new business start-ups. Sixty-two percent of the communities had three or more new businesses open within the last year. In spite of this, 70% felt there is not an adequate number or variety of shops in their communities. Many comments were of the nature that there is room for business expansion as well as the need for more specialty stores. An itemized list of businesses required was often presented by the respondent during the interview. Some mentioned the economy as being an inhibitive factor; however, others feel their community could support more new businesses.

When respondents were asked to comment on the satisfaction shoppers feel with their downtowns, the results were revealing. About 69% feel that there is a limited selection of goods. Shoppers apparently want more variety, more selection, and more competition.

Regarding the physical state of the 26 communities surveyed, there appears to be much dissatisfaction. Seventy-three percent believe their downtowns could be improved and made suggestions surrounding lighting, sidewalks, signage, store fronts, and general cleanliness. While some communities have started improvement campaigns, others don't know where to begin.

There is an even split between respondents who feel the pricing in their community is competitive (46%) or not competitive (46%). Comments were made that small towns are generally higher in price and also that northern communities are often felt to be a captive market by some businesses. However, competing with high inventory stores like The Brick and Canadian Tire proves difficult.

The satisfaction with customer service is also split. Forty-six percent are satisfied with the service they receive locally, whereas 42% are dissatisfied and see room for improvement. Hospitality training (through Alberta Tourism) was mentioned as a way to improve customer service.

A very strong response followed the question surrounding business leakage, that is, the perception that local retail dollars are going elsewhere. An overwhelming 88% of the respondents feel that their community is losing dollars to other centres. Edmonton emerged as the strongest competitor (83%) with West Edmonton Mall being identified specifically. A full 85% of the communities believe that local businesses could do more to keep those dollars in the community. A number of suggestions were given, including increasing promotions and advertising, becoming more aggressive and creative, and improving on pricing, selection and service.

Thirty-five percent of the northern towns have received shopping centre proposals in the last two years and, of that 35%, 82% have not materialized or have been put on hold. Aside from land use bylaws, only one community (4%) has a specific policy in place to discourage shopping centre development unless it is in the downtown area.

The respondents strongly believe that their communities could benefit from improvements in the downtown. Seventy-three percent would support economic improvements and 88% would support physical improvements with many specific ideas being suggested. Again, a concern of "how do we do it" emerged from the communities.

Half of the communities surveyed have already had discussions surrounding their downtowns, 92% of these discussions being initiated by business or community groups. Almost 25% of these communities have actually taken steps to deal with downtown concerns. Some of the projects include conducting studies, surveys and design plans, hiring a coordinator, and completing sidewalks and campsites. There are organizational and financial concerns with a major problem being the lack of funding for projects, for staff, and from businesses.

A strong 77% feel there should be assistance provided to communities which want to revitalize their downtowns, with financial, planning, technical and consulting assistance given as some suggestions. Only 4% of the respondents were against any type of assistance being provided to communities.

Seventy-three percent of the respondents have ideas for projects to revitalize their downtowns - both economically and physically - if there were a downtown revitalization program.

Summary of Survey Results

To summarize, the main points are highlighted below:

1. 96% of those surveyed have a chamber of commerce or board of trade operating in their community.

2. 70% feel there are not enough shops or types of shops in their community.

3. 62% of the communities had three or more new businesses open up within the last year.

4. 69% feel the shoppers are not satisfied with the selection of goods available.

5. 73% feel the shoppers are dissatisfied with the physical appearance of their downtown.

6. 88% feel their communities are losing retail dollars due to business leakage with 83% of those naming Edmonton and especially West Edmonton Mall, as the largest competitor.

7. 85% of the respondents feel that the businesses could do more to retain their retail dollars.

8. In the 35% of communities which received shopping centre proposals in the last two years, 82% of the proposals did not materialize or were put on hold.

9. 4% of the communities surveyed have a specific policy in place to discourage shopping centre development anywhere but the downtown area.

10. 73% of the communities feel they could benefit from economic improvement in the downtown.

11. 88% feel they could benefit from physical improvements in the downtown.

12. 50% of the communities have had discussions surrounding downtown concerns, 92% initiated by community or business groups.

13. Of the 50% that have discussed downtown concerns, 25% have taken action and have completed projects to improve their downtowns.

14. 77% of the respondents feel more assistance should be provided to communities which want to revitalize their downtowns.

15. 73% of the communities have specific ideas for projects to carry out if a downtown revitalization program were available.

Summary

A number of communities in northern Alberta have shown initiatives in implementing revitalization activities. The community survey also indicated a further number of towns that expressed an interest in becoming more involved in revitalization activities. Downtown revitalization has an increasingly important role to play in improving the economic viability of northern Alberta communities.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION IN ALBERTA

Introduction

Downtown revitalization has been a topic of interest in Alberta for some time. The Devonian Program is probably the most familiar downtown initiative taken by the province. Sponsored by the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations, Main Street Alberta, as it was known, was one of the first attempts to help communities beautify their downtowns. The objective of the program was to assist Albertans to carry out facelifts on their main streets. Eligible projects included buying street furniture, hanging flowers, building kiosks, adding pedestrian malls and landscaping. The funding provided a grant for two-thirds of the eligible costs with the community funding one-third of the costs. Because "sweat equity" could be taken into consideration for the community's portion, some communities ended up paying out very little.

Main Street Alberta was in operation for five years between 1973 and 1978. In total, approximately $10 million were committed for 172 agreements. The program had some successful results; however, as has been discussed, beautification alone is not the answer to downtown problems. And, although the Devonian program did stress local initiatives, this didn't necessarily include local commitment which is vital in order to ensure continued maintenance and upkeep on the improvements. Main Street Alberta was Alberta's first experience with a downtown revitalization program.
Today, in Alberta, some options are open to aid communities attempting revitalization projects. Although a program aimed specifically at downtown revitalization is not presently available, some positive initiatives have been taken by the Alberta government.

Legislation

At present, there are three legislative options open to communities to allow them to collect levies to raise money for downtown improvements. These include Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) legislation, the local improvement levy, and the redevelopment levy.

- Business Revitalization Zones (BRZs)

In 1983, legislation was passed to allow the establishment of Business Revitalization Zones. The Business Revitalization Zone or BRZ legislation provides a mechanism for businesspeople to raise funds for a designated area and carry out revitalization activities. Section 171.4 of the Municipal Government Act outlines the activities which may be included in this legislation:

> (a) to improve, beautify and maintain municipally owned lands, buildings and structures in the area, in addition to any improvement, beautification or maintenance that is provided at the expense of the municipality at large
>
> (b) to acquire (by purchase, lease or otherwise) any real property necessary for its purposes and improve, beautify and maintain that property
>
> (c) to promote the area as a business or shopping area
>
> (d) to undertake interim improvement and maintenance of any property mentioned in clause (b) for use of parking and subsequently to dispose of that property (by sale, lease, exchange or otherwise) for public or private redevelopment of commercial purposes at a price not less than its fair market value

(e) to conduct any studies or prepare any designs that may be necessary for the purposes of this section[23]

A BRZ can be initiated at the request of 10 representatives of businesses on the Business Tax Assessment Roll. The Municipal Council sends a notice to those businesses on the current assessment roll that would be affected. The BRZ is passed as a bylaw unless 33% of those businesses oppose the bylaw within 60 days. A board of directors, which is responsible for planning the budget to carry out the revitalization activities, is then formed. The municipality arranges for the collection of taxes from the businesses within the designated zone.

The report entitled The BRZ and Downtown Revitalization, identifies a number of benefits that a downtown can achieve through adopting a BRZ. Some of these benefits include:[24]

- By contributing financially, businesses are more likely to be committed and to participate.
- Annual budgeting and planning is easier due to the uniform tax system for collecting funds.
- The bylaw allows for a wider range of revitalization activities to take place - both physical and economic.
- Because of the bylaw structure, cooperation is encouraged between businesses and council.
- The BRZ necessitates a formal organizational structure.

The BRZ is not without its limitations. Keith Driver and Associates identified some potential problems in their Guide to Downtown Revitalization:[25]

- Funding only runs for one year and a new bylaw must be prepared for each subsequent year. This can be both a limitation and an effective check on an over-enthusiastically based program.
- Local businesspeople have to spend considerable time and effort (including their own funds) in persuasion before it is agreed that Business Revitalization Zone legislation should be implemented.
- Legislation can be passed without a clear idea as to purpose, program implementation or anticipated costs.

Although BRZ legislation provides for a need, it cannot be seen as the panacea to all downtown woes. The successful BRZ takes much time and extensive groundwork to develop and "sell" and, although this instills commitment, it can also discourage those communities which may not have the available local skill and/or resources. Assistance from an outside organization, agency or department may be necessary in order to direct, advise and develop a community to the point where it can implement the BRZ bylaw. Size of the community may have an effect on the viability of a BRZ with a smaller community possibly lacking the resources - both financial and technical - that a larger urban centre would have. In Alberta the majority of BRZs established to date have been in cities such as Red Deer, Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray. Sylvan Lake has been the exception in size and the fact that it was a pilot project with an "advisory team" providing advice and assistance also makes it unique. A smaller, rural northern Alberta town with a limited number of businesses in its downtown area, is also limited in the amount of funds that can be raised for revitalization projects. This narrows down the size and number of activities the community needs to engage in to enhance the economic viability of the area.

Because the BRZ legislation has only been in use since 1983, it is still relatively early to assess its effectiveness. Nonetheless, the BRZ legislation can be an excellent tool to have available in the revitalization process and its use should be encouraged for communities that have reached that stage of organization.

- The Local Improvement Levy

Raising capital funds to improve municipal property is the purpose of the local improvement levy. Section 149(1) of the Municipal Taxation Act outlines the activities that can be undertaken with this levy, some of which are outlined below:

- Roadway improvements
- Sidewalk improvements
- Public property landscaping
- Public property maintenance
- Street malls, plazas and public walkways development
- Street lighting and seasonal decoration purchases
- Land acquisition and park development
- Land acquisition and recreational facilities development

There are a number of differences between the BRZ legislation and the local improvement levy.[26]

- Although both types of legislation allow for capital work and public area improvements, only the BRZ allows for promotion of the area, which can include initiating marketing and economic programs as well as hiring a promotions coordinator.
- Only those who directly benefit from the physical improvements are assessed a levy even though others may also benefit.
- Council administers the local improvement levy whereas the BRZ is administered by a BRZ board made up of businesspeople.
- The local improvement levy is assessed against the property whereas the BRZ is levied against the business.

A local improvement levy may be used in conjunction with the BRZ bylaw.

- The Redevelopment Levy

Section 75 of the Planning Act defines the redevelopment levy. The following points can be noted:[27]

- The Redevelopment Levy is usually applied to new development or major redevelopment projects rather than minor improvement projects.
- It can be used only for the acquisition of land for school, park, or recreational facilities within the redevelopment area.

Although the redevelopment levy alone is too restrictive to be used for revitalization projects, it may be used in conjunction with the BRZ bylaw, providing the downtown is included in the area redevelopment plan bylaw.

Of the three types of legislation available, the Business Revitalization Zone is clearly the most applicable for revitalization projects in that it allows for the promoting and marketing of downtown and the possible hiring of a coordinator. Although not without its drawbacks, a BRZ provides a useful tool for the revitalizing community.

Other ways of raising capital for downtown projects are available with a little creativity and a lot of cooperation. Peace River, for example, uses two unique methods for raising funds for revitalization projects. In order to plan for future parking needs, a parking fund has been established. Each business is levied a fee for parking space. If the business provides its own parking space, a credit is given on its tax assessment. Also, any parking meter and parking fine revenues go into the fund. When new parking needs to be developed or a parking lot paved, the fund provides ready capital.

In order to help fund the Peace River Board of Trade office and manager, town council and the local businesses agreed to increase the business licence fee and pass on the extra revenue to the board of trade. This has resulted in a positive and agreeable solution to all parties.

Generating some capital for revitalization projects can be done through the use of available legislation and unique community solutions. The key in raising the funding is cooperation and commitment among all the key players. If the revitalization efforts are deemed worthwhile by those involved, solutions can be achieved. Of the legislative options, only the BRZ is really geared toward funding promotion and marketing projects, as well as physical improvements. The local improvement and redevelopment levies are geared specifically to capital projects for physical improvement. Each community will have to assess its requirements and goals and decide which options, or combinations thereof can best meet their local needs.

Revitalizing Downtown Alberta: A Self Help Action Kit

In November 1985, the Inter-Agency Planning Branch of Alberta Municipal Affairs released a Self Help Action Kit entitled Revitalizing Downtown Alberta. The "kit" contains comprehensive material, including resource guides and practical workbooks, for those users interested and involved in revitalization activities. In addition to the workbook which allows a community to analyze and evaluate its downtown, the following resource materials are available:

- Revitalizing Downtown
- The BRZ and Downtown Revitalization
- Government Grants and Programs
- Hiring Consultants

Two other handbooks, "Facade Improvements" and "Public Area Improvements", are still under production and will soon be available.

The Self Help Action Kit has had successful results in a pilot project at Sylvan Lake - with assistance provided to the community by an "advisory team" consisting of staff from the Departments of Municipal Affairs and Economic Development and Trade. Two hundred copies of the kit have been distributed and a second printing is underway. Unable to keep up with the requests for assistance, the advisory team plans to introduce the kit and its usage to staff of the Regional Planning Commissions and to business development representatives of the Department of Economic Development and Trade. As they tend to have more day-to-day contact with communities, these departments can play a major role in advising and assisting in local revitalization efforts.

Because of the comprehensive nature of this kit, it may be difficult for communities which are only in the initial stages of revitalization to utilize the information effectively. It has the potential of overwhelming a community just in the "interest" stage. The value of the Self Help Action Kit may be highest when used in conjunction with one-on-one consultation with appropriate resource and technical people.

Technical and Advisory Assistance

Two government departments are involved in the area of downtown revitalization in Alberta: The Department of Municipal Affairs and the Department of Economic Development and Trade. Regional Planning Commissions also play a role in providing technical assistance.

- Municipal Affairs

As identified in Comparing Alberta's Program Initiatives, the work of the Depar-ment of Municipal Affairs "addresses the need for technical and organizational support in the form of land use planning assistance, local facilitation and the development of continuing capabilities locally".

Some projects undertaken to address these needs include writing articles; conducting presentations; sponsoring speakers; developing a slideshow; developing and sponsoring courses, seminars and workshops; and developing a package of information and resource material for the revitalizing community - previously referred to as the Self Help Action Kit.

In the publication, Comparing Alberta's Program Initiatives, the work of other provinces in the areas of legislation, technical and organizational support, and financial assistance are compared with the revitalization initiatives Alberta has taken. A summary is found in Appendix D. In terms of the technical and organizational support, the report shows Alberta has "a little" involvement in design assistance and public meeting leadership; "some" involvement with technical support, organizational and process facilitation, provincial liaison, municipal policy preparation and activity monitoring; and "considerable" involvement in seminar and conference sponsorship, resource material development and training programs.

The Department of Municipal Affairs has considerable expertise in the area of revitalization and upon request will assist communities in their efforts; unfortunately, manpower limitations affect the type and amount of involvement that the department would like in the community.

- Department of Economic Development and Trade

Alberta Economic Development and Trade has been working closely with Alberta Municipal Affairs recently, specifically in a community pilot project using the Self Help Action Kit. A team approach has been developed where the expertise of representatives from both departments can be utilized by the community.

Alberta Economic Development and Trade is presently looking at expanding its involvement in revitalization in conjunction with Alberta Municipal Affairs. The following areas of interest have been identified:

- Advisory Board - Form a joint advisory board between Municipal Affairs and Economic Development and Trade to work with community teams in guiding them through the Self Help Action Kit. The board could also be in liaison with other government departments, share information, and package programs already in existence that could be modified for use in revitalization projects.

- Communication - Develop and encourage general networking among key and interested persons and communities. This could include a newsletter to provide an update on activities in the province and to share tips or ideas tried with success in revitalization projects.

- Education - Encourage the sharing of information on revitalization so involved departments are aware and updated.

Through its Small Business Division, Economic Development and Trade can also provide an array of programming to meet the needs of the individual businessperson. Counselling and the Management Assistance Program (MAP) are but two examples of available technical advice on promotion, marketing and management.

Because successful revitalization includes a strong economic strategies component, the Department of Economic Development and Trade has a large and increasingly important role to play in downtown revitalization.

- Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)

Regional Planning Commissions encourage communities to have viable and attractive downtowns. To this end, they can provide much in terms of support and advice to communities that request assistance in dealing with downtown issues.

The RPCs get involved in helping communities develop general plans and in doing studies on their downtowns for background data, such as on the condition of downtown or its commercial land use. Economic indicator studies may come into play for use by the municipality, the region, or other departments. Some also conduct workshops on topics of interest to the communities in their regions.

The Regional Planning Commissions act as a resource to municipalities. Because the commissions deal with many municipalities on a day-to-day basis, they can share expertise and provide material as needed.

The involvement of planning commissions in revitalization is dependent on a request from the community for assistance in planning, design and so on. The RPCs can also be proactive and some have a slideshow on downtown ideas that may encourage a community to analyze its own downtown and perhaps take steps toward downtown improvement.

Because of their involvement in their communities on a regular basis, RPCs can play a major role in advising and assisting downtown revitalization locally.

In terms of technical and advisory assistance for revitalizing communities, each department plays a role.

Municipal Affairs

- Land use planning (where there is no planning commission)
- Conducting presentations
- Developing and sponsoring courses, seminars and workshops
- Developing resource material (Self Help Action Kit)
- Facilitating community organization and process
- Providing technical support

Economic Development and Trade

- Counselling and programming for individual businesses
- Expanding involvement with Municipal Affairs in advising, communicating and educating on revitalization

Regional Planning Commissions

- Land use planning
- Developing general downtown plans
- Conducting economic indicator studies
- Providing technical resource
- Assisting in design

Financial Assistance

There is no financial program available in Alberta specifically aimed and directed at assisting in revitalization projects. A number of provincial and federal grant programs are available, however, that may be used throughout the revitalization process. The Self Help Action Kit has dedicated a report to outlining these programs, their sponsor, eligibility criteria, funding assistance and their applicability to downtown revitalization projects. Following are some examples of the grant programs available. The reader is referred to the above-mentioned kit for a complete listing.

Grant Programs

Employment and Immigration Canada

- Canadian Jobs Strategy
  Wage subsidies provided for job creation and training programs

Alberta Agriculture

- Farmers' Market Grant Program
  Grant monies for producers to market their products

Alberta Culture

- Assistance programs for various historical resources

Alberta Economic Development and Trade

- Railway Relocation Policy Program

Alberta Manpower

- Youth Employment and Training Program
- Alberta Environment Employment Program

Alberta Recreation and Parks

- Community Recreation/Cultural Grant Program

Alberta Transportation

- Street Assistance Program
- The Basic Capital Grant Program
  Support for providing a basic level of urban transportation
- Public Transportation Operating Assistance Grant Program
- Major, Continuous Corridors and Primary Highway Connectors/Primary Highway Maintenance Programs

Other Initiatives

In addition to the revitalization initiatives presently in existence, a new program - Main Street Alberta - is being developed by Alberta Culture for revitalizing communities of an historic nature.

Alberta Culture is not normally involved in revitalization projects unless historic buildings are located in the downtown area. This can be a real asset as in the case of Fort Macleod. Heritage promotion, building renovations and economic strategies have proven a dynamic combination.

At point of writing, discussions have taken place among Heritage Canada, the Historical Resources Foundation and Alberta Culture toward the prospect of new programming aimed at heritage communities in Alberta. Assistance could be provided technically and financially, in restoring historical buildings in the downtown. Details should be available in 1987.

Summary

Alberta has taken a number of strides in revitalization initiatives, including the BRZ legislation and the Self Help Action Kit. In terms of technical and advisory assistance, there is some attempt at a coordinated approach by the Departments of Municipal Affairs and Economic Development and Trade. Unfortunately, limitations in staffing resources are curtailing the amount of involvement available to communities. Other departments and agencies, such as planning commissions, have an increasingly important role in the area of revitalization in the community.

Some grant programs are available for use in revitalization projects. Many of their eligibility criteria and objectives, however, limit their applicability for use in the revitalization process.

Alberta Culture's proposed program for revitalizing historic mainstreets may fill a need, although in terms of historical resources, northern Alberta is somewhat limited.

This review of what is presently available in Alberta for revitalization projects is followed in the next chapter by an analysis of what further resources may be required.

[23]Keith Driver and Associates, "A Guide to Downtown Revitalization" Alberta Municipal Affairs, June 1984, App. B.

[24]"The BRZ and Downtown Revitalization", Revitalizing Downtown Alberta - A Self Help Action Kit, Alberta Municipal Affairs, February 1986, pp. 7-8.

[25]Driver and Associates, pp. 38-39.

[26]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[27]Ibid., p. 11.

FURTHER RESOURCES REQUIRED

Introduction

The previous sections of this report have summarized various aspects of downtown revitalization. Among these were included a review of the typical process communities go through in developing a downtown project, an analysis of the economics of revitalization and a summary of the resources available in Alberta. It has been suggested that, in completing this report, a critical analysis of various aspects of downtown revitalization be carried out in order to arrive at an understanding of possible future resources required. Consequently this chapter will summarize: the assistance required to complete the critical phases identified in a successful downtown revitalization process and the components that are presently available in Alberta. It will conclude with the identification of further resources which emerged from this comparison of process requirements and programs available.

It should be noted, however, that summarizing such an analysis is not without its shortcomings in that a complex process is simplified to only a few key points. What is important to note is that while there is assistance available during the various phases, further resources are required in several areas in order that communities can successfully undertake revitalization projects.

Phase I - The Initial Step

Assistance Required

- Proactive work to initiate "the spark"
- Community awareness of what is available o Education regarding the components of revitalization
- Technical assistance to help explore downtown concerns and available resources
- Technical advice in setting initial goals and objectives
- Technical information on the process of revitalization
- Public meeting organization and facilitation
- Survey expertise and support

Assistance Available

- Limited proactive activity from involved agencies
- Technical resource information in the Self Help Action Kit, including sample business and consumer surveys and community workbook
- Limited technical resources from involved agencies due to limited staff resources affecting
    - Technical assistance, advice and information
    - Public meeting facilitation
    - Survey expertise and support

Further Resources Required

- Further proactive involvement
- Further community awareness of what is presently available
- Resource personnel available to communities which require
    - Technical assistance, advice and information
    - Public meeting facilitation
    - Survey expertise and support
- Availability of general educational information and material of a less technical nature

Phase II - Establishing an Organization

Assistance Required

- Technical assistance regarding types of organizational structures available
- Technical information regarding legislative concerns
- Organization and process facilitation

Assistance Available

- Limited technical resources and organization and process facilitation due to limited staff resources
- Technical resource information in the Self Help Action Kit

Further Resources Required

- Technical assistance
- Organization and process facilitation

Phase III - Project Outline and Budget

Assistance Required

- Financial assistance to hire consultants and/or technical experts such as engineers, planners, marketing experts
- Technical and advisory assistance

Assistance Available

- Technical resource information in the Self Help Action Kit on hiring consultants
- Limited technical and advisory assistance

Further Resources Required

- Financial assistance for community studies
- Further technical and advisory assistance

Phase IV - Implementation

Assistance Required

- Financial assistance for
    - Project coordinator
    - Promotions
    - Marketing
    - Training and seminars
    - Public area improvement
    - Capital projects
    - Facade improvement and design
- Technical and advisory assistance

Assistance Available

- Limited financial assistance through grant programs
- Some financial assistance through municipal AMPLE grant
- BRZ legislation for funding
    - Project coordinator
    - Promotions
    - Marketing
    - Some public area improvements

- Some design assistance through regional planning commissions for streetscape work
- Some training and seminars provided through Small Business Division of Alberta Economic Development and Trade
- Some technical resource information in the Self Help Action Kit
- Limited technical and advisory assistance

Further Resources Required

- Financial assistance for
    - Project coordinator
    - Promotions and marketing
    - Public area improvement
    - Capital projects
    - Design
    - Training and seminars
- Further technical and advisory assistance
- Minor changes in existing grant programs to enhance their applicability

Phase V - Monitoring the Project

Assistance Required

- Evaluation criteria to measure progress
- Technical assistance
- Support association (i.e., BRZ Association)

Assistance Available

- Limited technical information in the Self Help Action Kit
- Limited technical assistance

Further Resources Required

- Established evaluation criteria to measure project progress
- Further technical assistance
- Support association

Summary

The most pressing need in terms of the analysis of further resources is the availability of resource personnel to provide technical expertise to communities in the revitalization process. All five phases identify technical resources as a need - from the initial phase through to the monitoring of project activities. The expertise for these activities is available but a shortage of available staff resources limits their involvement in communities. Staff dedicated to revitalization, from departments involved in such activities, could coordinate and provide resources to communities as required.

In the implementation phase, clearly financial assistance emerges as a further resource important to the carrying out of revitalization activities. Although some options are presently available in this phase, they do not provide the degree of assistance most communities require. Financial assistance also comes into play in the project outline phase when a community study may be undertaken. While some government grant programs are available, most have very specific project criteria which presently exclude revitalization projects. Minor changes in criteria could adapt these programs very well to various components of a revitalization project. Re-priorizing existing resources need not be expensive or require an infusion of new money but rather make revitalization activities eligible under existing programs.

The Self Help Action Kit provides an excellent source of technical information useful to the community in all phases. Initially, however, educational information of a more general nature may be useful to a community just in the "interest" stage.

The present resources available to communities wanting to revitalize greatly assist them in their efforts. Further resources are needed, however, to facilitate the movement through all phases of the revitalization process.

SUMMARY

Preparing the report on downtown revitalization involved the following multi-faceted approach:

1. An extensive literature review
2. A survey of 26 municipalities in northern Alberta
3. A broad review of all downtown revitalization programs in Canada
4. A more intensive review of the downtown revitalization programs in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, including a field trip to four British Columbia municipalities involved in their provincial program as well as extensive discussions with the Director of the British Columbia Downtown Revitalization Program
5. Consultation with and direction from an 11-member steering committee involving northern municipal leaders and government resource people

Following are some of the major findings and conclusions which emerged during the course of the study:

1. Downtown revitalization requires a commitment to a comprehensive approach involving organization, promotion, marketing and design for success. Although physical improvements may occur within this process, revitalization cannot rely on beautification alone. A dynamic revitalization program requires both economic and physical components to be successful.

2. A number of success factors in revitalization have been identified in the literature, and include the following:
   - o Concern
   - o Optimism and confidence
   - o Commitment
   - o Cooperation

- Coordination
- Leadership
- Participation
- Comprehensive plan
- Strong merchant organization
- Financial commitment
- Full-time management
- Business-like approach
- Media support
- Publicity
- Public partnership

3. Of these success factors, some emerge as critical to success and crucial in any revitalization endeavor.

   - The process of revitalization must be initiated and controlled by the businesses and the community themselves. Decisions and actions have to come from the local level if there is to be long-term commitment and cooperation.

   - A strong comittment is vital in fulfilling the goal of revitalization. Both public and private sectors must believe that with time, energy and money, downtown can be restored to its functional state.

   - Cooperation among all of the key players is a critical factor in downtown revitalization. The businesspeople, town administrators, municipal council, local planners, and public must all be willing to overcome differences in working toward a common goal.

   - Full-time management has been identified as very important to the success of a revitalization project. Coordinating, organizing, and communicating can more effectively be accomplished by someone whose time is dedicated to the project as opposed to volunteers with other commitments.

4. A generic trend in the process of revitalization can be identified and involves five phases: the initial phase (the spark, exploring issues and establishing support, public awareness and setting goals and objectives), establishing an organization, preparing a project outline, implementing the project and monitoring the project. The local process initiated, developed and operated by the community, enhances the success of the project.

5. Economic results of community revitalization efforts are clear:

   - Evidence from revitalization activities in B.C. points to an increase in economic development, in business sales and in tourism activity in a survey of a cross-section of six revitalizing communities. The sales increases ranged from 27%, reported in one community, to a high of 84% in another. Other measured factors implied the program was very successful.

   - Main Street Canada communities have realized economic benefits from revitalization. Perth has seen 15 businesses open and 66 jobs created within three years. Fort Macleod has filled seven of eight retail vacancies and added 15 businesses; its theatre group has increased attendance from 1,500 to 15,000 visitors in four years.

   - Other revitalized Alberta communities are also seeing results. Old Strathcona in Edmonton has had 80 new businesses open in the last two years. In five years, the Fringe Festival has increased attendance from 7,500 to 119,000 visitors and increased revenues from $30,000 to $200,000. In three years, Red Deer has decreased its vacancy rate from 23% to less than 1%, added 62 businesses and 16 professional offices, created an estimated 225 jobs, and seen 20 business expansions. Approximately $6.5 million has been spent by the private sector on physical structure improvements, expansions and renovations.

6. In northern Alberta, there appears to be an emerging interest in downtown revitalization and community development. Case studies of Grande Prairie, Peace River and Grimshaw give evidence of their activity and involvement; other northern communities are in the initial stages. Because the communities are at different phases in the process, each has different needs and requirements. Issues and concerns were reflected in the 26 municipalities in the community survey. Some key findings follow:

- 70% of respondents feel there are not enough shops in their community.

- 69% of respondents feel customers are not satisfied with local selection of goods.

- 88% of respondents feel they are losing retail dollars due to business leakage.

- 85% of respondents feel businesses could do more to retain their retail dollars.

- 73% of respondents feel that shoppers are dissatisfied with the physical appearance of their downtown.

- 73% of respondents feel they could benefit from physical improvements downtown.

- 77% of respondents feel more assistance should be provided to communities wanting to revitalize downtown.

- 73% of those interviewed have specific ideas for downtown revitalization projects if assistance was available.

7. Downtown revitalization can be an effective program anytime, but becomes particularly important in periods of economic slowdown. While it cannot be proven conclusively, it appears that the dollars spent provincially can have a dramatic economic "spin-off" effect locally. This can show up in increased sales, materials and labor for facade development, materials and labor for capital improvements, business marketing and promotion activities, tourism, new building construction, etc. Also, the revitalization and increased stability of local businesses cannot be overlooked. There is a strong indication that limited tax dollars can have a positive economic development impact on the business community in downtown northern Alberta.

8. While communities can engage in downtown revitalization programs independently through their own merchants' associations and municipal councils, the evidence strongly suggests that more can be achieved if a provincial program is in place to assist interested groups both financially and technically.

9. A provincial program does not necessarily have to be "expensive" in order to be successful. While it is true that two other provinces with successful programs have a "grant" component, the largest portion of the program is centred around the revolving-fund concept. Money borrowed by municipalities for downtown revital- ization is paid back over a period of years. However, small grants can be an effective incentive for communities to develop initial concept planning, encourage individual business facade improvement to fit an overall community strategy, and undertake collective marketing strategies.

10. Present revitalization activities in Alberta primarily involve the departments of Municipal Affairs and Economic Development and Trade and include such initiatives as BRZ legislation and the Self Help Action Kit. In terms of technical and advisory assistance there is some attempt at a coordinated approach between these two departments although limited staffing resources have curtailed their involvement in the community. Resources designated to downtown revitalization concerns and community projects could provide the much-needed assistance, direction and support required by revitalizing communities. It appears there may be need for a more focused government response in actually designating an appropriate group to work exclusively in this area.

11. The lack of financial assistance for revitalization projects is apparent in the project outline and implementation phases. Financial assistance is required for components such as project outline development, project coordination, capital projects, and promotions and marketing. Although some grant programs are available through Alberta Transportation, Alberta Culture, and also the Northern Development Agreement, minor changes in their eligibility criteria could enhance their applicability to the revitalization process. Re-priorizing existing resources is not expensive and does not necessarily require an infusion of new money.

In summary, it is apparent that downtown revitalization is an important and timely topic for many of our northern communities. Because of the many and varied aspects of effective revitalization projects and programs, it is suggested that a workshop be held in northern Alberta in the near future. This workshop would involve merchants and municipal leaders from across northern Alberta, planning commissions, government representatives, and resource people from successful Canadian programs, and would provide the opportunity for further discussion and action planning.

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- APPENDICES -

APPENDIX A

SURVEY CONTACT LIST

ATHABASCA

Cliff Sawatzky
Town Manager
Athabasca, Alberta

BEAVERLODGE

Otto Sterkenberg
Town Manager
Beaverlodge, Alberta

BONNYVILLE

Bill Newell
Town Manager
Bonnyville, Alberta

COLD LAKE

Myron Goyan
Municipal Administrator
Cold Lake, Alberta

ELK POINT

Pat Vincent
Municipal Administrator
Elk Point, Alberta

FAIRVIEW

Don Howden
Town Manager
Fairview, Alberta

FALHER

Gerard Nicolet
Municipal Administrator
Falher, Alberta

Andrew Colley
Executive Director
Smoky River Regional
Economic Development Council
Falher, Alberta

FOX CREEK

Nick Ozoroff
Town Manager
Fox Creek, Alberta

GRAND CENTRE

Raymond Coad
Town Manager
Grand Centre, Alberta

GRANDE CACHE

Duane Dukart
Municipal Administrator
Grande Cache, Alberta

GRIMSHAW

Raymond Rondeau
Town Manager
Grimshaw, Alberta

HIGH LEVEL

Gordon Lundy
Municipal Administrator
High Level, Alberta

HIGH PRAIRIE

John Jarvie
Municipal Administrator
High Prairie, Alberta

Brent Kolodychuk
Executive Director
High Prairie Regional
Economic Development Board
High Prairie, Alberta

LAC LA BICHE

Richard Persson
Municipal Administrator
Lac La Biche, Alberta

Dave McArthur
Director
Lac La Biche Regional
Economic Development Council
Lac La Biche, Alberta

MANNING

Lorraine Lovlin
Secretary/Treasurer
Manning, Alberta

MCLENNAN

Laurent Lamoureux
Town Manager
McLennan, Alberta

PEACE RIVER

Jack McLeod
Town Manager
Peace River, Alberta

Blaine Alexander
Manager
Peace River Board of Trade
Peace River, Alberta

RAINBOW LAKE

John Barron
President
Chamber of Commerce
Rainbow Lake, Alberta

SEXSMITH

Len Imrie
Town Manager
Sexsmith, Alberta

SLAVE LAKE

Bernie Kreiner
Town Manager
Slave Lake, Alberta

SPIRIT RIVER

Elaine Reid
Town Secretary/Treasurer
Spirit River, Alberta

ST. PAUL

Wayne Horner
Town Secretary/Treasurer
St. Paul, Alberta

SWAN HILLS

John Crisp
Municipal Secretary
Swan Hills, Alberta

VALLEYVIEW

Lynn Stocking
Town Manager
Valleyview, Alberta

Geoff Sawyer
Executive Director
Valleyview Regional
Economic Development Council
Valleyview, Alberta

WEMBLEY

Karen Steinke
Municipal Secretary
Wembley, Alberta

WHITECOURT

William Winger
Town Manager
Whitecourt, Alberta

APPENDIX B

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION
COMMUNITY INDICATOR SURVEY

Number _____

Community _____

Date _____

Name _____ Address _____

Position _____ Phone _____

A. GENERAL

1. What business groups or associations are presently operating in your community?

___ Chamber ___ Board of Trade ___ Downtown Merchants ___ Other _____

2. a. How many business licences were issued this year (1986)? _____

b. Has there been an increase or decrease since ____? _____

Comments: _____

No. _____

B. DOWNTOWN

3. Can you tell me about your downtown area?

a. Number of blocks _____
b. Number of streets _____
c. Does a highway go through your town? _____
d. Other comments _____

_____

4. Can you comment on the following:

a. How many retail spaces are vacant in the downtown area now? _____

_____

b. Has there been an increase or decrease in retail space vacancies in the last year? _____

_____

c. How many new businesses have opened up in your downtown in the last year? _____

_____

d. In your opinion, is there an adequate number of shops and types of shops in your community? _____

_____

e. What type of parking do you have downtown? _____meters _____ open other _____

f. What is the perception of the downtown parking situation?

_____

_____

No. _____

C SHOPPING

5. Have any studies been done on shopping patterns, business opportunities, customer satisfaction, etc? _____
If yes, can I get a copy?

6. In your opinion, are shoppers in general satisfied with their downtown in terms of:

a. Selection of goods _____

_____

b. Competitive pricing _____

_____

c. Customer service _____

_____

d. Physical appearance _____

_____

7. Can you define your regional shopping area? _____

_____

8. Is there a perception that the retail dollars of your community are going elsewhere? _____. If yes, where? _____

_____

9. Is there a feeling that local businesses could do more to tap the retail dollars? _____

_____

No. _____

10. Have any proposals for local or regional shopping centres been brought to the town's attention in the past two years? _____

_____

_____

a. If yes, by local or non-local groups? _____

_____

b. Is there a policy or by-law in place to deal with shopping centre development? _____

_____

D. REVITALIZATION

11. Do you feel your community could benefit:

a. From economic improvements in the downtown? _____

_____

b. From physical improvements in the downtown? _____

_____

12. Are you aware of any discussions by a business or community group on downtown concerns? _____

_____

If yes:

a. What comments/issues were brought up? _____

_____

b. Were any suggestions made? _____

_____

c. Were any plans or projects carried out? _____

_____

d. What were the outcomes? _____

_____

e. Were any government departments involved, i.e., Town Council, Planning Commissions, Municipal Affairs? _____

_____

f. Did the group have any organizational or financial concerns?

_____

_____

13. Do you feel that more assistance should be provided to communities who want to revitalize their downtowns? _____

If yes, what type of assistance is needed? _____

_____

14. Are you aware of the Business Revitalization Zone or BRZ legislation currently in place to help downtown businesses in revitalizing their downtowns? _____

_____

15. If there was a downtown revitalization program, what kind of projects could you see happening in your community? _____

_____

_____

No. _____

16. Do you have any other comments regarding downtown revitalization?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. Is there anyone else in your area or region that I should also be talking to? _____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX C

SURVEY RESULTS

COMMUNITY INDICATOR SURVEY

A. General

1. What business groups or associations are presently operating in your community?

85% chamber of commerce
7.5% board of trade
7.5% no business groups

Of the 92% with business groups there were some communities with additional groups besides the chamber of commerce and board of trade. These include the following:

Business revitalization committee
Downtown revitalization committee
Businessmens association (2 communities)
Trade show committee
Tourism development committee
Small business merchant association
Retail merchants

2. a. How many business licences were issued this year (1986)?

58% provided accurate or estimated figures
19% didn't know
23% don't issue business licences

Of the 58% that responded, the numbers ranged from 23 to 800, the average being 169 licences issued.

b. Has there been an increase or decrease since 1985?

Of the 20 that issue business licences:
30% increased
35% remained stable

B. Downtown

3. Can you tell me about your downtown area?

a. Number of blocks

23% - 1 to 3 blocks
35% - 4 to 6 blocks
27% - 7 to 9 blocks
15% - 10 to 12 blocks

b. Number of streets

65% - 1 to 3 streets
27% - 4 to 6 streets
8% - 7 or more streets

c. Does a highway go through your town?

31% yes
65% no
4% part way

4. Can you comment on the following:

a. How many retail spaces are vacant in the downtown area now?

31% - 0 to 1 vacancy
35% - 2 to 3 vacancies
23% - 4 to 5 vacancies
11% - 6 to 8 vacancies

b. Has there been an increase or decrease in retail space vacancies in the last year?

42% increase
19% decrease
39% no change

c. How many new businesses have opened up in your downtown in the last year?

34% - 0 to 2 new businesses
50% - 3 to 5 new businesses
12% - 6 or more
4% unsure

d. In your opinion, is there an adequate number of shops and types of shops in your community?

23% yes
70% no
7% unsure

Comments:

- Even if there were more stores, people would still go out to shop.
- There is always room to expand.
- We could use more specialty stores.
- We have a good cross-section.
- Considering the economy, there are enough shops.

- We have no room or space available to expand.

e. What type of parking do you have downtown?

77% free
19% two hours free
4% meters

f. What is the perception of the downtown parking situation?

54% parking good, satisfied
42% parking inadequate, unsatisfied
4% unsure

Comments:

- Parking is always a problem - even though municipal parking has lots available.
- Busy at peak times and weekends.
- Typical small town. Customers always want to park on the cash register. If they can't, there is a parking problem.

C. Shopping

5. Have any studies been done on shopping patterns, business opportunities, customer satisfaction, etc.?

50% yes
50% no

6. In your opinion, are shoppers in general satisfied with their downtown in terms of:

a. Selection of goods?

27% yes
69% no
4% unsure

Comments:

- We have no shopping centre (competition) so our downtown is vital.
- There is a good variety of types of stores but not enough selection within each store.
- We would like more variety.
- The shops need to increase their inventory.

b. Competitive pricing

46% yes
46% no
8% unsure

Comments:

- We are fairly competitive, but are outdone by The Brick and Canadian Tire.
- If you watch the sales, prices are competitive. Regular prices are higher.

- The prices are slightly higher but that is common in small towns.
- There is a problem (in pricing) as identified by our study.
- It depends on the area. For example, vehicles may be higher but groceries are competitive.
- It depends on who you talk to.
- Some businesses are competitive with other communities.

c. Customer service

46% good, very good
12% no problem
42% problems, room to improve

Comments:

- Good. Better than anywhere else.
- It depends on the merchant.
- They could all use a (hospitality) course.
- The service is much more personal.
- It is varied. There is a high staff turnover.
- We're working on it with the hospitality training.
- Businesses feel they have a captive market.

d. Physical appearance

19% satisfied
73% not satisfied, could be improved
8% unsure

Comments:

- The town has been cleaning up the streets and now the businesses are getting involved.
- Really good as compared to other small towns our size.
- We're working on it but now need the merchants to help out with the cost of lights.
- No, definitely not. The town is not clean and we need to work on sidewalks, facades, signage.
- No. Could improve the stores and sidewalks.
- Not bad but could be better.

7. Can you define your regional shopping area?

Since some respondents answered in distance, some in population and others by listing the communities, the surveyor could draw no conclusions.

8. Is there a perception that the retail dollars in your community are going elsewhere?

88% yes
8% no
4% some

If yes, where?

Of the 88% who said yes, the following locations were identified.

83% Edmonton
52% Grande Prairie
22% Peace River
39% Other

Other locations included Westlock, Grand Centre, St. Paul, Bonnyville, Lloydminster, High Level, Whitecourt, Barrhead.

The total does not equal 100% as more than one response was allowed.

9. Is there a feeling that local business could do more to tap the retail dollars?

85% yes
7.5% no
7.5% not sure

Suggestions:

- Increase promotions
- Improve advertising
- Organize a formalized merchant association
- Provide better service
- Enhance store fronts
- Be more aggressive
- Be more creative
- Have sales
- Implement MAP (Management Assistance Program)
- Decrease prices
- Expand selection
- Improve customer relations

Comments:

- Businesses feel they have a captive market.

- We will always lose shopping dollars. People automatically go elsewhere.

- There is a problem of shiftwork. People in the oil patch work four days and are off for three so they go out (shopping) on their days off.

- Businesses could unite, work together, provide better service, and advertise.

- Businesses need to be more aggressive and creative.

- The businesses could do more but they have to do it.

10. a. Have any proposals for local or regional shopping centres been brought to the town's attention in the past two years?

35% received proposals
65% didn't receive proposals

b. If yes, by local or non-local groups?

64% local developers
36% non-local developers

Of those who received proposals for shopping centre development:

9% project completed
9% construction started
46% on hold
36% not materialized

Two communities received 2 proposals, both of which were counted.

c. Is there a policy or bylaw in place to deal with shopping centre development?

96% land use bylaw
4% policy for "downtown only" development

Comments:

- There was a proposal but they couldn't get enough businesses to relocate from downtown.

- There is a general plan to discourage any shopping centre development unless it is in the downtown area.

- We have no policy (on development) as we don't want to restrict any development. We support and encourage development.

D. Revitalization

11. Do you feel your community could benefit:

a. From economic improvements in the downtown?

73% yes
27% don't know

Suggestions:

- Fill lots and empty buildings
- Attract new businesses locally and/or regionally
- Hold promotions
- Plan a trade show
- Market aggressively
- Increase competition to decrease price
- Improve image
- Improve customer service
- Expand existing businesses

Comments:

- Yes, but how can we do it?

- The community has a perception problem.

- We need a drawing card.

- How can we justify attracting a new business when the market is not there?

- We would like new businesses but there is nothing vacant or available downtown.

b. From physical improvements in the downtown?

88% yes
12% don't know

Suggestions:

- Have a theme
- Improve infrastructure
- Encourage facade development
- Improve parking
- Increase signage
- Improve maintenance

Comments:

- Downtown looks good but we have to develop the entrance to town (off the highway) to encourage tourists to come in.

- We used the Devonian program and it was very successful. We don't know what else we can do.

- We have a lot of absentee land owners (which makes it difficult).

12. Are you aware of any discussions by a business or community group on downtown concerns?

50% yes
50% no

Of those who are aware of discussions,
92% initiated by community organization
8% initiated by town

Community organizations include:

Chamber of Commerce
Board of Trade
Businessmen's Association
Retail Merchants Association
Royal Purple
Revitalization Committee

77% of respondents are at the "talking stage"
23% of respondents are at the "action stage"

Those in the talking stage have discussed:

- Promotions
- Shopping patterns
- Lease space availability
- Marketing

- Filling vacant lots
- Store facade improvements
- Litter containers
- Town maintenance
- Signs
- Customer service
- Planters
- Business leakage
- Selection
- Tourism

Those in the action stages are working on the following:

a. **Issues**

- Physical deterioration
- Improving visual appearance
- Business leakage
- Tourism
- Parking

b. **Suggestions**

- Amalgamate business organization to form one board of trade
- Apply for program funding

c,d. **Plans or projects carried out and/or outcome**

- Completed studies
- Hired coordinator
- Developed some new facades
- Surveyed the community
- Completed campsite
- Completed sidewalks
- Completed design plans

e. Government departments involved?

- Town council
- Planning commissions
- Small Business - Business Development Representative
- Economic Development Board
- Alberta Transportation
- Alberta Culture
- Alberta Heritage Foundation
- Alberta Recreation and Parks
- Northern Development Branch

f. Organizational or financial concerns?

Organizational:

- Getting people out to meetings
- Heavy reliance on volunteers who after time burn out
- No organizational problems as long as there is no cost to the businesses

Financial:

- Presently, all organization funding has been through the economic development board but we will need other sources when projects are planned. We have many financial concerns and have approached government departments for funding.
- The businesses do not want to put in any money.
- We need a full-time person.

13. a. **Do you feel that more assistance should be provided to communities which want to revitalize their downtowns?**

77% yes
19% possibly
4% no

b. **If yes, what type of assistance is needed?**

- Financial, including funding for:
  - Infrastructure
  - Operations
  - Start-up
  - Consultants
  - Public improvements
  - Facades
- Planning
- Technical
- Counselling
- Consulting
- Needs assessment
- Ideas
- Studies

Comments:

- Yes, we need financial and consultant monies.
- Financial would help.
- Definitely. The Devonian program was good. We need something like that every 10 years.
- If they (businesses) show interest, desire and commitment, financial assistance should be available.
- Financial assistance is always nice, but will it cause a dependency?
- Communities may need an incentive or start-up grant.
- Possibly, but the businesses have to initiate things.
- Definitely dollars are needed, but in these times is it feasible?
- Technical assistance is needed but we are leary of financial burdens as communities could get in over their heads.
- We get lots of help from the planning commission.
- We need all kinds of assistance, such as technical, planning, and financial.
- No. It should be up to the community, town, and businesses. No public money should be used.

- Self-help is important.
- Businesses must initiate the actions.
- If there is business commitment.
- No capital funding should be provided.
- It distorts local priorities. A new program changes budgets and other things are put on hold.
- Loans are O.K.
- Municipalities can arrange their own financing.

14. Are you aware of the Business Revitalization Zone (BRZ) legislation currently in place to help downtown businesses in revitalizing their downtowns?

70% yes
15% somewhat
15% no

15. If there was a downtown revitalization program, what kind of projects could you see happening in your community?

73% gave ideas

23% unsure

4% no ideas

Comments:

Physical

- Paint stores
- Build kiosks
- Plant trees
- Improve facades
- Increase parking
- Purchase planters
- Develop pedestrian mall
- Plant greenery
- Improve maintenance
- Fix up town entrance
- Develop a theme
- Improve sidewalks
- Develop highway system
- Improve infrastructure
- Develop a park
- Improve lights
- Hang flowers
- Fill gaps between buildings
- Create a play area downtown

Economic

- Fill vacant building space
- Assist office start-up
- Staff downtown office
- Plan promotions
- Assist small business
- Attract new businesses
- Market businesses
- Develop tourism
- Expand variety of goods
- Study and assess business needs

16. **Do you have any other comments regarding downtown revitalization?**

Comments:

- There should be an "Idea Exchange" for small town revitalization as in the U.S.
- 80% of new community growth comes from within the community, so we should look there for development.
- Single resource towns are in trouble. Where do we go? What help is available? What have other communities done? We don't want to re-invent the wheel.

APPENDIX D

PROVINCIAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES *

SUMMARY

	B.C.	SASK.	ONT.	QUE.	N.S.	N.B.	AB.
Legislation							
		BID	BIA	SIDAC	BIA	BIA	BRZ
Enabling Legislation Enacted		X	X	X	X	X	X
Business Organization Required for Funding		X	X		X	X	
Technical and Organizational Support							
a. Land Use Planning							
Planning Instrument Needed for Funding			X	X	X	X	
Funding Provided for Planning	X		X	X	X	X	
Direct Planning Services Provided		X	X			X	
b. Pre-Program Advice & Facilitation							
Technical Support	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
Organizational & Process Facilitation	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
Provincial Liaison	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
Design Assistance	X	X					+
Preparation of Municipal Policy			X				O
Conduct Public Meetings	X	X	X	X	X		+
c. Post Program Support							
Ongoing Technical Advice	X	X	X	X	X	X	O
Sponsor Seminars & Conferences			X		X		O
Development of Resource Materials			X	X	X		O
Training Program			X		X		O
Financial Support of Network (BIA Assoc.)			X		X		
Publication of Newsletter	X		X		X		
Monitoring of Activity	X	X	X		X		O

● - A great deal

◐ - Considerable

◑ - Some

+ - A Little

PROVINCIAL DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION INITIATIVES

SUMMARY (continued)

	B.C.	SASK.	ONT.	QUE.	N.S.	N.B.	AB.
Financial Assistance							
Public Area Improvement	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Facade Improvements	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Planning - Consultant Studies	X		X	X	X	X	
Promotion Aid	X						
Special Activities	X						
Anchor Development			X	X	X		
Parking			X	X			
Service and Utilities			X				
Training			X		X		

* Excerpted from "Comparing Alberta's Program Initiatives With Other Provinces", Inter-Agency Planning Branch, Alberta Municipal Affairs, 1985.

APPENDIX E

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM FUNDING COMPONENTS

As further detail to Chapter 6 on Downtown Revitalization Programs, the following is a summary of the specific funding components of the three main programs discussed: the Downtown Revitalization Program in B.C.; the Mainstreet Program in Nova Scotia; and the Main Street Canada program of Heritage Canada. The objectives, eligibility criteria, and financial assistance are noted for each component.

British Columbia: Downtown Revitalization Program

1. Start-Up Grant
   a. Objective - to assist in beautification/concept planning and initial work prior to applying for the loan and facade grants
   b. Eligibility - as per general program criteria
   c. Financial Assistance - $5,000 grant per community

2. Loan Assistance For Capital Improvement
   a. Objective - to finance new revitalization works within or of benefit to, a designated downtown area
   b. Eligibility - satisfy the inspector that the downtown is economically viable and revitalization will help make it so
   c. Financial Assistance - a loan of up to 75% of the total estimated work is paid back over 12 years, with interest amortized over 10 years; municipal eligibility is based on population and the ability to pay for improvements; maximum is $1,000,000 per municipality; advance may be approved for $10,000 to prepare the concept plan, and if agreement signed becomes part of the loan

3. Promotion Aid Grant
   a. Objective - to assist merchants to organize themselves and promote the downtown area through the use of the media and advertising
   b. Eligibility - the downtown area must be designated by the Minister and must also have a Capital Improvement Loan approval
   c. Eligible Projects - includes holding promotions, buying street furniture, merchandising, and market analysis programs
   d. Financial Assistance - 25% of the approved budget or a per capita rate - whichever is lesser; per capita includes $1 per 10,000 population: $.50 per 50,000; and $.20 per remainder

4. Facade Improvement Grant
   a. Objective - to improve shop fronts
   b. Eligibility - any type of building as long as it is part of the municipal design concept
   c. Financial Assistance
      i. Front - the lesser of 20% grant or $200/metre
      ii. Side - the lesser of 10% grant or $100/metre
      iii. Rear - the lesser of 10% grant or $100/metre

<u>Nova Scotia: Main Street Program</u>

1. Anchor Projects Funding
   a. Objective - to facilitate implementation of projects key to the successful revitalization and economic stimulation of downtown commercial activity
   b. Eligibility - any community is eligible to apply but must complete the following:
      i. the downtown database
      ii. a long-term, three to four year development plan
      iii. endorsement from other organizations if not making a joint submission
      iv. appropriate documentation from municipal council and indicating approval and financial support

c. Eligible Projects - includes consultant studies; 50% of a program coordinator's salary; capital projects such as street and sidewalk improvement, parking and pedestrian amenities; training seminars and workshops; promotion activities; and property acquisition. (NOTE: ineligible projects include cleaning, maintenance, infrastructure [water and sewer] and activities normally funded by other government departments.)

d. Financial Assistance - 50% of total eligible costs:

i. Shareable expenditure of the project will be covered with a maximum of $20,000 in provincial funds for a coordinator.

ii. Capital costs and land purchases or leases will be evaluated in relation to their prominence as a component in achieving the project objectives.

iii. Any direct wage cost will be covered at 50%.

2. Facade Improvement Program

a. Objective - to upgrade the appearance of commercial building exteriors that are visible to the shopping public

b. Eligibility - any commercial building:

i. owner or tenant located in a recognized Business Improvement District of communities currently actively participating in the MSP

ii. committed to maintain "new appearance" for a minimum of five years

iii. membership in the Downtown Development Corporation if in existence

iv. significant visual impact not construed as normal maintenance

c. Financial Assistance

i. $3,000 toward initial professional advice for specifications and sketches

ii. rebates for completed approved projects to be the lesser of 30% of total costs or a maximum determined by size of project

iii. 40% of total cost of signage

iv. special rebates of the lesser of 40% of total improvement costs or a maximum determined by size of project for groups of commercial buildings (minimum three) that follow a complementary improvement scheme

(NOTE: maximum funding of $15,000 for Facade Improvement)

3. Business Development Program

a. Objective - to increase economic vitality by offering businesses an opportunity to review and assess their current business practices and develop new approaches through the retention of qualified consultants

b. Eligibility - businesses in the improvement district of communities actively participating in the Mainstreet Program

c. Eligible Projects - include management and staff training, market research, advertising and promotional planning

d. Financial Assistance

i. 65% of total cost to a maximum of $2,000

ii. 75% to a maximum of $2,500 for business groups (minimum of 5)

4. Regional Coordination Meetings

a. Objective - to provide support for regional meetings of Mainstreet Coordinators to share ideas and expertise among communities

b. Financial Assistance - $100 to each organization

Heritage Canada: Main Street Canada

The Main Street Canada Program does not provide financial assistance per se but, instead, focuses on providing support, training and a resource to the Main Street community. Assistance is provided in the selection and training of a coordinator; establishing a Main Street office; preparing technical manuals and audio-visual presentations; conducting design workshops; advising on store front design and signage; and conducting marketing studies.

The community is expected to provide for the costs of the coordinator's salary, the Main Street office and any operating costs for a minimum of three years. Main Street Canada recommends an annual budget of about $65,000 of which approximately 30% is provided by the municipality; 40% through government programs; and 30% from other sources.